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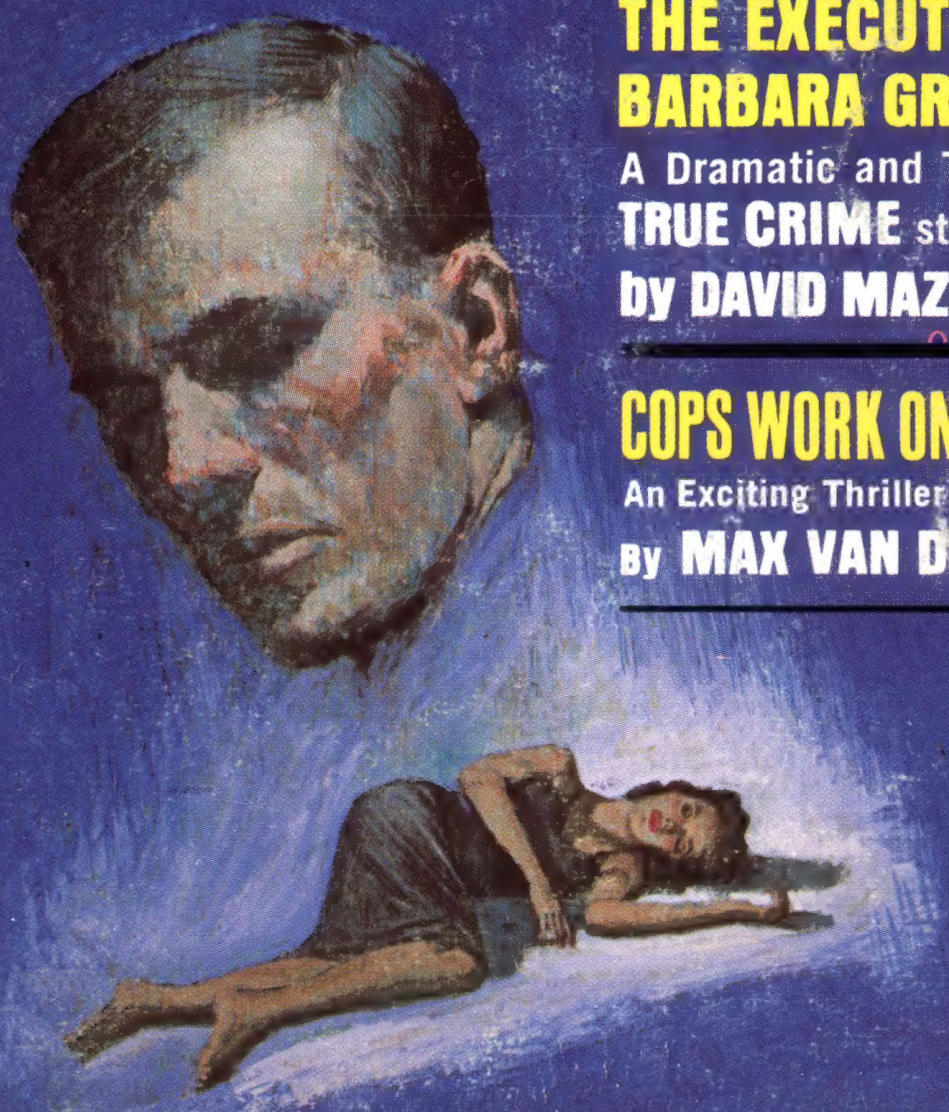

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September-257

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER, 1971
VOL. 29, NO. 4

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

Murder of a Mean Old Man

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Hated by many, feared by all, he had lived alone with his hidden treasure. Now he was a bloody corpse, and the beasts of prey were prowling, searching for the gold he had stolen from them. To Mike Shayne, the case was as simple as it was deadly. Inside there was a man who had killed and would kill again. Could he stop him?

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 29, No. 4, September, 1971. Published monthly by Renown Publications, Inc. 56 W. 45th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10036. Subscriptions, One Year (12 issues) $7.00; Two Years (24 issues) $14.00; single copies 60¢. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1971, by Renown Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American copyright conventions. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return 3579 to 56 W. 45th Street, New York, New York. 10036.

MURDER OF A

Somewhere in that fear-wracked place a man lay hidden. A man who had killed and would kill again this night — unless Mike Shayne got him first . . .

THE NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

by BRETT HALLIDAY

THE HOUSE WAS full of a darkness that was almost tangible. The killer had a feeling of swimming in darkness as if it had actual substance. Only the beam of the little pen-sized pocket flashlight punched a thin ray of light into the reluctant dark.

It was enough, and barely enough, to show the ancient, rusted japanned tin dispatch box in the recess behind the panel in the wall.

The killer's hands grabbed the box and lifted it out. Old as it was, the metal was tough and the rusted lock resisted fumbling fingers. The killer turned. The box could be opened at leisure in a safer time and place. A screwdriver or chisel would turn the trick easily enough.

The beam of the little flash danced across the walls and floor of the incredibly cluttered room. It flicked the twisted face of the old man lying in his blood on the floor, and then moved on as if appalled at what it had revealed.

There was still life of a sort in the

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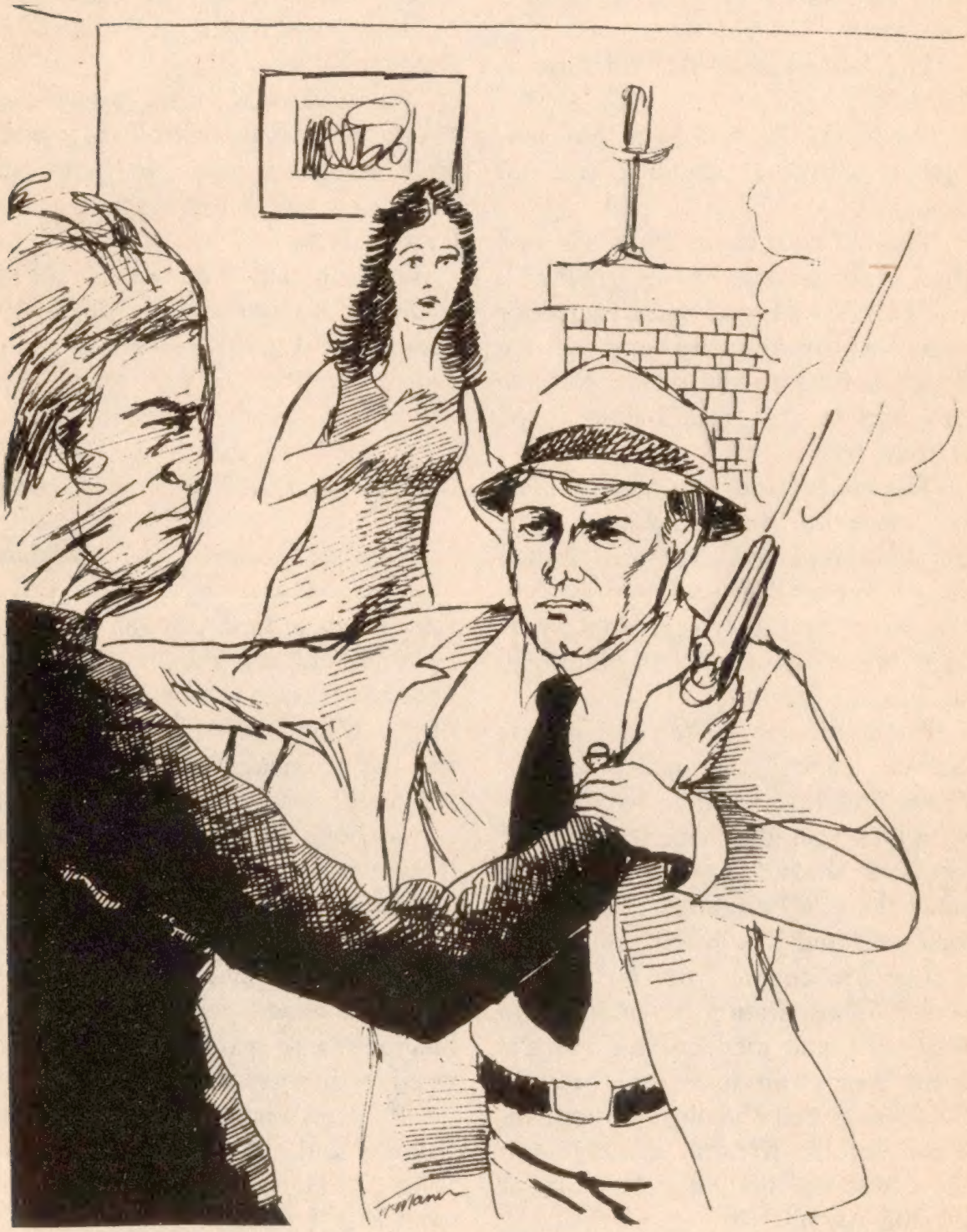
MEAN OLD MAN



broken and bleeding body. When the light passed there was a scuffling sound as a limb scraped the floor and an awful gurgling shadow of a groan.

The killer kicked the old head—hard.

"Shut up," he said in a thin, malignant whisper. "Shut up, you old devil."

The old man didn't hear. He had died in the middle of that groan.

The killer slipped out a rear door and cut through the yard of the house behind to the street. No one saw and no one would have cared if they had.

The big two-story frame and stucco house sat silent and dark. The neighborhood was old and turning into a slum. There was no one on the street and the adjoining buildings were, as usual at midnight, dark and silent too.

The candle the killer had lit just before leaving the house burned lower and lower. After what seemed a long time the flame touched the kerosene soaked rags that had been piled there to be ignited. Then there was light and fire in the house.

The fire engine from the Northwest Miami Station screamed into the street, and men broke down the front door with axes and brought their hoses and chemical equipment. They got the fire out quickly—but there was the body on the floor of the big room.

A prowl car came and the officers looked. Then Sergeant McCloskey of the Miami Homicide Squad came in an unmarked car with his driver.

"I don't believe it," McCloskey said when he looked at the corpse.

"Pretty awful, ain't it," one of the firemen said.

"Awful is right," McCloskey said. "Whoever did in this old boy must have hated his guts. He looks like he'd been worked over by a whole tribe of Apaches."

The sergeant had seen a lot of bodies in his years on the force. He thought he'd gotten hardened to the sight, but this corpse made him shudder in spite of himself.

* * *

"I don't believe it," Michael Shayne, Miami private detective, told his beautiful private secretary Lucy Hamilton. Shayne and Lucy and ace feature writer Tim Rourke of the Miami *News* were sitting in the big redheaded detective's Flagler Street office. Outside the windows hot tropical sunshine beat down on the street, already crowded with mid-morning traffic.

It was still cool inside the high ceilinged office and the three friends were having coffee together. Shayne's and Rourke's cups were laced with good French brandy.

"If you don't believe it," Tim Rourke said, "then it just isn't so. It just can't be so, and by the way what is it that isn't?"

"You're fouling up your grammar or syntax or something."

"A minor detail," Rourke said. "Very minor indeed. So what are we talking about anyway?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Shayne said. "But then I seldom do. What I have in mind is last night's murder as described on the front page of your own paper this morning."

"Oh sure. The John Wingren killing. What's so unusual about another killing in Miami, the Magic City?"

"This one is unusual," Shayne said. "The killer was really devoted to his work this time. According to the *News,* the old boy was killed three times."

"A neat trick if you can do it," Rourke added, and poured more brandy into his coffee. He considered also adding more coffee and then rejected the idea with a grimace. "Only I always thought it only took one killing for a murder."

"Usually it does," Shayne agreed, "only this killer was a real buff. It says here the old man was fatally shot."

"That usually does the job," Rourke said.

"Don't interrupt. He was also stabbed to death."

"Redundant, my boy. Absolutely repetitive."

"On top of that," Shayne continued, "he'd been viciously and brutally beaten and several major bones broken in the process. According to the coroner the beating alone could very well have brought

about the death of a man that age."

"Maybe there were three killers," Rourke offered. He obviously didn't care very much one way or the other.

"Next you'll be claiming it was suicide," Shayne said and drank the last of his coffee. "It's an interesting case, but I'm glad this is one I'm not mixed up with."

"You are," Lucy Hamilton said. It was the first comment she'd made.

Shayne looked at her. The big redhead was still sleepy and the electric razor he'd used that morning had done a poor job on his face. He wiped sweat off his brow with the back of one big hand.

"I hope I didn't hear that," he said to Lucy. "I sincerely hope you

didn't say what I'm afraid you did just then."

"You heard me right the first time, Michael," Lucy Hamilton told him. "I'd just been waiting for the right moment to tell you."

"Okay, Angel," the big detecitve said. "I guess you better go right ahead and explain. I've got an awful feeling it'll be just as much of a shock if I put it off."

Lucy laughed at him. "Don't look so huffy," she said. "You know you could use a case right now, what with the inflation and all. It isn't the first one I've got you either. Besides, Anna was so terribly upset. She really does need help and I just didn't have the heart to tell her no. It would have been a cruel thing to do under the circumstances."

"Of course it would," said a highly amused Tim Rourke. "I agree with you one hundred percent."

"Who's Anna?" Shayne asked.

"Anna Wingren, of course," Lucy Hamilton told them. "She's the murdered man's sole surviving relative. His granddaughter as a matter of fact."

"Fascinating," Rourke said. "You see now why you have to take the case, maestro."

Lucy Hamilton ignored him. "Anna's also a very old and very good friend of mine," she told Shayne. "We were in college together. That was long before I met you or had any idea of moving to Miami. I ran into her here by accident a year ago and we've seen each other off and on since. So of course when she called me early this morning—"

"You went right ahead and signed up your boss," Tim Rourke said.

"Shut up, Tim," Mike Shayne said. "Lucy hasn't had time to tell us about the missing treasure yet. Have you, Lucy?"

"What treasure?" Tim Rourke asked.

"How did you know?" Lucy asked.

They said it together, and it was Shayne's turn to laugh at them. "The treasure," he said. "When an old man who's supposed to be rich lives like a miser and gets himself killed in the middle of the night in a big old house, there's always a treasure involved. Usually it's hidden some place on the premises. There'd be no point in knocking him off if his money was all safe in the bank, would there?"

"I suppose not," Rourke admitted.

"Sure," Shayne said. "Besides, if all this Anna Wingren wanted was justice, she'd wait for the cops to turn up the killer. If she wants me this early in the game, it has to be to find a missing treasure."

"Which will pay your fee when you find it," Lucy said.

"If I find it," Shayne told them both.

II

WHEN MIKE SHAYNE drove up to the old Wingren home an hour later

the police were still on the grounds. That didn't stop the redheaded private detective from going on into the house. He'd been a close personal friend of Miami Police Chief Will Gentry for more years than either of them cared to remember, and the men on the force knew it. The uniformed officer at the door passed him in without question.

Sergeant McCloskey and a couple of men from the crime lab were in the big living room where the body had been found.

"Hello, Mike," the sergeant said cheerfully. "How did you get mixed up in this one?"

"I'm representing the heir this time," Shayne said. He didn't elaborate. He didn't have to.

"Another one of those hidden treasure deals, I suppose," McCloskey said. He'd been in the business a long time himself.

"You know that would be privileged information," Shayne said. "What happened here anyway, Mac?"

"We don't really know very much about it yet," the sergeant said. "You can see for yourself what a mess this place is. The other twelve rooms in the house are just as bad. Maybe worse. Anything hid in here could stay that way for a long, long time."

McCloskey could have been right. The room they were in was full of furniture, bric-a-brac, miscellaneous property and just plain junk. There were four standing lamps on the big library table by the window. One was an antique designed to burn whale oil. Only one of the three electric fixtures had a bulb.

On the same table were old books, a Chinese rose medallion teapot, two bronze foo dogs, seven ashtrays full of cigar butts, a pile of Sunday newspapers dating back for years, and a carved soapstone Indian peace pipe.

The rest of the room matched. Over the fireplace mantel the heads of an elk, a moose and a mountain sheep hung in a row as if they watched the rest of the room.

"You could have something there," Shayne said.

"I've run into some squirrelly types since I joined the force," McCloskey assured him, "but I think this guy Wingren was the champion packrat of the lot. From the looks of it, he never threw anything away in the whole of his life."

"What's chances the killer got away with whatever treasure there was?" Shayne asked.

"I've got no crystal ball," the sergeant said. "In this job there's times I wish I had. In a clutter like this, it's hard to tell, but I've got an educated hunch he didn't have time to make much of a search. Besides Doc said the body was still warm when he got here. Couldn't have been dead more than thirty minutes or so. That wouldn't give the killer much chance to look around —unless he did it before he killed, that is."

"How come you people got here so fast?" Shayne asked.

"The killer set a fire," McCloskey said. "No doubt at all it was arson. Probably meant to burn up the whole shebang so it'd seem old Wingren died in the fire."

"He'd burn the treasure too," Shayne objected.

"Maybe there wasn't any treasure, or he didn't know about it," the sergeant said. "Maybe he already had it. Maybe he just killed out of hate or some other motive. Or took a few bucks and a bottle of whiskey for a treasure. Men have been rubbed out for less in this town. Anyway, he set the fire. The old candle trick."

"I guess," Shayne said.

"We know," the sergeant said. "With a little luck this whole shebang would have gone up like a torch. Only this guy passing saw the fire and called the hose and ladder boys. They found the corpse and called us. Just luck."

"Who was this lucky passer-by?" the redhead asked.

"Guy by the name of Smulka. Jerry Smulka. Lives about four blocks on down the street. He was on his way home from the bus stop and saw the flames reflected through the front windows. The fire was in the hall toward the back. He ran back to the pay phone booth on the corner and called."

"What was this Smulka doing out at that time of night?"

"He's a security guard and was on his way home after finishing his shift. I'll give you his address, and you can ask him yourself."

"I will. What do the neighbors say?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all," McCloskey said. "Nobody saw or heard anything till the fire truck came. They just clam up and look like they want to spit on old John's grave."

III

THE WINGREN HOUSE sat on the corner in the middle of a plot of ground that had originally comprised four lots, or approximately a half acre. Unlike many old places it was not overgrown with brush, and the ornamental plants that run wild in the moist tropic climate. Old John had kept his land relatively clear. However, the place was shaded by big old mango and avocado trees. Particularly at night it would have been hard to see anyone prowling around the place.

It was by far the largest home on the block. This was only natural. Wingren had originally owned a couple of full city blocks and had built and sold smaller houses around his own place.

The neighboring home was an old frame stucco, now peeling green paint which had long needed renewal. It was a one-story house, considerably run down in spite of a neat flower bed fronting the street.

The door was opened as soon as Mike Shayne knocked.

"I already told you bums all I can," a female voice said, and the detective saw an elderly, white-haired woman peering out at him.

"You haven't told me a thing," Shayne said. "I don't even know what sort of a bum I'm supposed to be."

"You're another of them cops, ain't you?" she snapped. "Sure you are. I can smell you bums as far as I can see you."

"I'm not on the force," Mike Shayne assured her. "I'm a private investigator."

She stood there and stared up at him. Her old face was wrinkled with the lines of time and suspicion.

"You are here about the killing anyway?"

He nodded.

"Then I suppose Anna put you up to it. She'd be the one, wouldn't she?"

Shayne was silent.

"Well then, mister, how you expect me to talk if you ain't frank with me?" She made to slam the door, but the big man put his foot in the crack.

"Suppose I am working for Anna Wingren?" he said. "Just suppose that's it. Why would it make any difference to you?"

"I didn't say it would."

"How do you know about Anna?"

"You are new around here, ain't you?" she asked. "Who else would know about that family in the big house but old Jane Mullen? Sure, I know Anna since she were a snot-nosed kid playing under them trees there. Even if I ain't seen her since she and old John had their falling out. She's the only one in the world would care that he got his come-uppance."

"How do you know so much about it, Mrs. Mullen?"

"Your friends them cops didn't tell you much when you was up at the big house, did they? Well, no mind. I guess it ain't no secret around here. I worked for old John for thirty years. Cooked and washed and cleaned for him, I did. Yes, and nursed him when he got old and sick. Nobody else in the world he could trust like old Jane. If only he'd sense enough to know it, that is. More's the pity he didn't."

"You have some idea who might have wanted him dead then?" the big detective asked her.

"Ideas? Course I got ideas! So does everybody else ever knew that mean old man. Every living soul ever came close to John Wingren wanted him dead one time or other."

"So?"

"Don't look so surprised, you big cop. Ask around and you'll find out for yourself. He was a mean man, John was. A nasty, mean old man."

"Was he mean to you, too?"

She looked up at the big redhead out of beady, suspicious old eyes. "I ain't talking about that. Think you're going to blame something on me, don't you? I know how you bums work it. Well, I ain't going to take the rap for nobody. I said I used to work for John, not that I did lately. Oh, no. I wised up, I did, and good riddance to him. It's two full years since I been inside that house."

"What happened?" Shayne asked. "Did you have a fight with the old man?"

"You go on, get out of here," she said. "Sure, I had fights with him. Everybody did. But 'a fight,' something big I'd want to kill him about? No, indeed. No. You ain't going to make no murder suspect out of me that way. Now go on, get off my property before I call a real cop to put you off. You want I should do that?"

Mike Shayne stepped back and she slammed the door in his face.

"Old John wasn't exactly popular with that one," he told himself as he went on down the walk to the street. "Chances are if she knew who killed him she'd just want to pin a medal on the guy's chest. Let's hope somebody else around here will want to be a little more cooperative."

The next house he stopped at was a duplicate of old Mrs. Mullen's place, but whoever lived there had kept it up better. The place had had a coat of blue paint not more than a year or so back, and there was an expensive teevy aerial bolted to the side of the chimney.

An old man answered the door. He was thin. One of his legs had been broken and poorly set in the past so that he leaned on a heavy, old-fashioned natural oak cane to support himself as he talked.

"You here about old John being killed?" he said. "Come in. Come right in. I'll gladly tell you anything I know, though it's not much. It sure isn't much."

"You didn't see or hear anything suspicious the night of the murder then?"

"Sure. Sure I did, mister, but not to do with the killing of old John. I watch out. This whole side of town is dangerous after dark." The man's face was intent, his lips pulled back in what might have been a smile or just a nervous affectation. His eyes fairly glittered. Shayne was wary. He'd seen just that look on emotionally disturbed patients in Jackson Memorial Hospital.

"Maybe you better tell me what

you mean," Shayne said. "By the way, I didn't get your name."

"Smith," the old fellow said. "Just Smith. Buck Smith, to be exact. Corporal Buck Smith, used to be."

He gestured toward the rock fireplace at the back of the room. Above it on the wall was a faded photo of a troop of cavalry in turn-of-the-century uniforms. and a tattered guidon.

More to the point, a long rifle leaned against the corner of the mantel. Shayne recognized it as a government issue 1903 Springfield. He walked over to pick it up.

"Watch out now," Smith said. "That gun's loaded. You take care, mister. Wouldn't want nobody hurt."

"Neither would I," Mike Shayne said. He checked the gun. It was loaded. all right, and when he sniffed the muzzle he could tell by the acrid tang that the weapon had been fired recently.

"It's all right," he told Smith. "I understand guns. How come you keep this one loaded anyway?"

"Because I got good sense, that's why," the crusty old veteran said. "Like I was going to tell you, this neighborhood has got real dangerous after dark. Prowlers. Hoodlums. Crazy kids with their dope. Robbers. I tell you a man ain't safe unless he's ready to defend himself."

"Have you actually seen any prowlers?" Mike Shayne asked.

"Of course I have, mister. So has everybody this side of town, if they was honest with you about it. Sneaking, thieving, murdering prowlers. They comes round at night, but they leave old Buck alone."

"Because you've got the gun?"

"Because I'm ready for him, that's why. Had old John Wingren kept a gun he'd be alive right now, most like." The old fellow started snickering.

"What's so funny?"

"What's funny is old John's dead and I ain't. All that money he stole and cheated from folks don't do him no good now. No good at all. I told him I'd spit on his grave, and I will. I surely will."

"You aren't sorry he's dead then?"

"Course not, mister. Nobody ever knew old John will be sorry he died. We'll all be glad. You was talking to old Jane Mullen. I seen you come from her place. Didn't she tell you?"

"Well," Mike Shayne admitted, "I got to say she didn't seem real unhappy about it."

"You bet she didn't. Not since he cut her out of his will," Corporal Smith chortled. "Fight like cats and dogs they did, ever since that."

"Recently?" Mike Shayne asked.

"Sure. Last night early she was over to his place again fighting with him. Yelling like a couple of wildcats they was. I could hear them going on and on."

IV

WHEN MIKE SHAYNE left Buck Smith's house he decided to go

downtown and have a talk with his old friend Will Gentry, the rugged and highly efficient Miami chief of police. He needed some background information on the late John Wingren, and he figured the chief might have it.

He didn't mention to Sergeant McCloskey what Smith had said about Jane Mullen being in the Wingren home the night before. Smith had regretted letting it slip out at all, Shayne had observed. After that one statement the old man had clammed up and said no more. The big detective had preferred to leave without pressing the old soldier any further.

Actually Shayne wasn't quite sure what he was looking for at that point. After Lucy Hamilton had opened the subject, he had talked briefly to Anna Wingren on the phone. She had engaged him then for the purpose of finding her grandfather's fortune.

"He's supposed to be rich," she had said. "I know he was the sort who never trusted banks. Whether he has stocks and bonds or jewels or cash or what, I don't know, but I'll bet any amount he had it hidden around the house."

"Some folks think that's safe." Shayne had said.

"I begged him to keep it in the bank," Anna said. "He wouldn't listen to me any more than he did to Mother when she was still alive. He didn't trust us, I guess."

"You realize, of course," Shayne said, "that if there really was a large sum of money in the house, the killer may very likely have found it and taken it away. It's the most likely thing to have happened."

"I know," she said, "but if he did, then surely you'll be able to find evidence of it. You don't have to worry about your fee even in that case, Mr. Shayne. I'll inherit the house and contents and that will be a good sum."

"I wasn't worrying," Shayne said. "Not where any friend of Lucy's is concerned. I just wanted to know how far you want me to go to find and recover any money your grandfather may have had in the house."

"Go as far as you have to," Anna Wingren had said.

That was where they had left the matter. Now Mike Shayne was beginning to think the case would turn out more difficult than he had expected. Old Wingren was widely hated. It meant any number of people would have had a motive to kill him. The motive might not have been concerned with his money. If it hadn't been, then the money was probably still in the house. In time, a search and inventory would turn it up.

On the other hand, it would be stupid to wait weeks or even days for such a search to be completed. That would give time for the killer to cover his tracks if he did have the money. It boiled down to the fact that, to recover the money,

Shayne was going to have to find the killer.

Chief Gentry was in his office and he greeted his old friend warmly. "So you're looking into the Wingren business, Mike?" he asked. "Come along then. I was just on my way to homicide. Bill Ryan's taking a statement from the fella that found the body."

"Why now?"

"He's a night watchman. We let him go home for his sleep last night and told him to come down for a formal statement this morning."

When they got to the homicide division office the security guard, Jerry Smulka, had just signed the statement typed out for him by a secretary. He was a dark, slender man in his late thirties with heavy black eyebrows that almost met above the bridge of his nose.

While he waited, Gentry and Shayne read the formal statement. It was simple and apparently straightforward. Smulka had been walking home from his bus stop when his attention was attracted by flickering lights from inside the big house. He went closer and saw that they were flames from the back of the hall. He had pounded on the door and found it ajar, so he ran in calling out to alarm the resident. Then he saw the body on the living room floor. He couldn't see a phone in the house—Wingren didn't have one—so he'd run back to the corner to call the fire department.

"What did you do until the engines came?" Shayne asked.

"It's in the statement." Smulka said. "I didn't know whether old John was dead or hurt or passed out, so I ran back into the house to find out. That's when I saw he was dead. I just stayed there. If the fire had gotten close, I'd have pulled the body out."

"But you didn't have to?"

"No. The engines got there in a hurry."

"You sound like you knew who the dead man was."

"Sure. Everybody in that part of town knew who old John was. He'd lived there longer than anybody could remember."

"Were you a friend of his?" That was from Chief Gentry.

"Friend? I don't think that man had a friend in the world. He was a mean one, and folks knew it."

"Did he have any special ene-

mies?" Shayne said. "I mean was there somebody who maybe hated him so much they might want to see him dead."

Smulka gave a cynical chuckle. "From what folks say that could be anybody ever did business with him. Mean and tricky, they called him."

"That's not what I asked."

"You mean can I say who might have killed him? Put that way, no. No—I can't."

"What about robbery? Did you see any signs the killer had been searching the place?" Gentry spoke again.

"In that rat's nest?" The man was openly incredulous. "How would anybody tell?"

"He's got a point there, Will," Shayne said. "You ever hear that the old man had money hid there, Mr. Smulka?"

"No more than you hear it about any rich old goat lives like that," Smulka said. "Me, I always figured anybody smart enough to steal all that money would be smart enough to put it in a bank."

"Steal all what money?" Shayne said.

Smulka gave him a startled look. "How would I know, mister? Just what people said. They say one way or other he cheated everybody around the neighborhood. Just talk like you hear when people shoot their mouths off. Look, chief, can I go now? I got things to do."

"You can go," Gentry said.

Back in Chief Gentry's office, Mike Shayne helped himself to a Havana cigar, a glass of good brandy and a comfortable chair.

"Not much to learn from that," Gentry said.

"I don't know," Shayne said. "Maybe it's just a hunch but that character seemed to know an awful lot about the old man for just a casual passer-by."

"I wouldn't figure that," Gentry said. "You know how those old neighborhoods are. Gossip, gossip, gossip. People been there so long they know all about each other's dreams even. Nothing to do but flap their mouths."

"Somebody had more to do than that last night."

"You don't even know that for sure," Gentry said. "The killer could have been a stranger. You know how those young punks from downtown prowl around looking for a place to break in and steal what they can."

"I don't think so, Will. That sort aren't killers usually. Besides, why that particular house?"

"I know," Gentry said. "You think it was a neighbor after the miser's gold. Was there a lot of money in that house, Mike?"

"I don't really know any more than you do. The dead man's granddaughter seems to think so. At least she's sure enough to hire me to find it."

"I'll pass the word to the boys to let you come and go as you like around there," Gentry said. "Of course if you find the killer while

you're after the money I want to know."

"Sure you'll know. You know me, Will."

"That's just it. I do. I don't want you holding out evidence again to suit yourself."

"Your boys got any suspects yet?"

"Not exactly, Mike. This is a puzzler just because it looks like everybody in a country mile had some sort of motive. If there were witnesses they'd be hostile in court. We don't even know for sure what killed him. He'd been stabbed twice through the back into the lungs. He was also beat up real bad, and shot."

"Shot with what?"

"We don't know. Ballistics says a soft lead slug apparently ricocheted off something and ended up in old John's liver. In the process the slug was battered so they can't tell even the caliber."

"Could it have been from a rifle?" Mike Shayne was thinking of Corporal Smith's gun.

"It could have been from anything. They think the bullet broke up on something hard and only part of it entered the body. The boys at the house are looking for the rest of it."

"I see."

"We're looking for a young punk down the street who was seen near the house. If anybody has a reason to hate the old man, I guess he'd be it."

"What happened to him?"

"From what we hear old Wingren hired him to fix a leaky roof on the house. The kid was newly married and out of work and needed money. The old man wanted a cheap job. Never got a permit for it or anything. The boy fell off the roof and broke both legs. One of them hasn't ever healed right. The old man never gave him a cent in compensation, not even the wages he was owed for the work he did. Just laughed and told him to sue if he thought it would do him any good."

"A real fine man, old John," Shayne said. "From the sound of that it's a good thing I never dealt with him myself. If I had you might have me on your suspect list. What's the kid's name?"

"Calvin Harris. We can't find him. If you do, let us know."

"I don't know," Shayne said. "After what you told me I might not want to."

V

MIKE SHAYNE went back to his own office after he left Chief Gentry's. Anna Wingren was waiting for him there with Lucy Hamilton.

Anna proved to be a pleasant faced, almost pretty young woman with brown eyes and soft brown hair.

"I brought you a set of keys to the house, Mr. Shayne," she said. "I got them from Grandfather's lawyer and told him you were fully authorized to come and go as you please."

"That's fine," Mike Shayne said.

He sat down behind his big office desk and let Lucy Hamilton mix him a drink. "This may be a complicated case, Miss Wingren. In the first place, do you have any real reason to believe Mr. Wingren kept large sums of money on the place?"

"I think I have," she said easily. "Ever since I can remember he's said he has. He used to say he didn't really trust any bank. It would make a nice treasure hunt for the family after he died, he'd say. I suppose he thought he was being funny."

"Could he have been just kidding?" Lucy asked.

"Oh, no. He wasn't that kind when it came to money. Besides, his lawyer believes it too. He says he has some of the old man's property deeds and things like that in his vault, but not even all of those. Grandfather kept a small checking account for convenience, but the lawyer also believes there were very large sums of cash he hoarded somewhere"

"Any idea how large?" Mike Shayne said.

"Well, the lawyer, Mr. Roberts, made what he called an educated guess. The amount he named was around a quarter of a million dollars. I have to admit it shocked me."

"Whew!" Mike Shayne said. "I don't wonder. That much cash stashed some place in an old house is enough to bring all sorts of killers around. If that figure was talked about, it's a wonder your grandfather lived as long as he did."

"I'm afraid it wasn't really a secret," Anna admitted. "Mr. Roberts said he had the same sum mentioned once by Mrs. Mullen, who was grandfather's housekeeper."

"That would be Mrs. Jane Mullen who lives next door?"

"The very same. She worked herself to the bone taking care of grandfather for years and years. I'm afraid he treated her very shabbily too. All the while instead of paying her decent wages, he kept promising to leave her a fortune when he died. She isn't even mentioned in the will. When she found that out, there was an awful fight between them."

"That's just fine," Shayne said. "She already knows enough to tell people he has two hundred and fifty gees stashed in the house, and he goes and has a fight with her. Your grandfather was a real sharp man for a dollar, but I can't say I think much of the rest of his brains."

"I know," she said. "I've had to live with that thought all my life. That's the way he was though. Mr. Shayne, I know you have a rough job ahead of you. I'm offering you ten percent of any money you can recover for me. Is that satisfactory?"

Mike Shayne thought of ten percent of a quarter of a million dollars.

"That sweetens the pot." he said.

"Michael would do his best anyway," Lucy Hamilton told her friend, "but I think that's very generous of you, Anna."

Mike Shayne drove back uptown

to the Wingren house. He got there before the afternoon traffic had really begun to build up on the streets. The house looked peaceful in the rays of the westering sun. The fire hadn't burned enough to show from outside and the police who had been there a few hours before had gone about their business.

The door was the old-fashioned sort, with a solid lower half and then a big pane of heavy plate glass so anyone inside could see who was on the step.

Mike Shayne put the key Anna had given him into the lock. It turned easily and the door began to swing open on well-oiled hinges.

The pane of plate glass showed an intricate network of spider-web cracks centered on a neat round hole. A split second before there hadn't been any cracks. Then the glass broke into a thousand shards that flew into the hall.

The big redheaded detective reacted by sheer animal instinct, the same lightning fast reflexes that had saved his life many times before.

He finished pushing the door open and literally dove into the hall as if he were going into a pool His body lit flat on the carpet and he rolled to the side, pulling his big, black forty-five automatic from its belt holster as he did so. Before the door was fully open, his body was back against the side of the hall where it couldn't be seen from the outside.

Shayne hadn't heard the shot, but a big jet plane from the Miami Airport was thundering overhead at the time, and that would have masked the firing of a cannon.

Through the open door the street looked perfectly peaceful in the afternoon sun. There were no cars in sight anywhere. In fact, nothing moved at all but a couple of feisty little dogs chasing each other back and forth on the far side of the street.

Shayne made sure nothing moved before he got to his feet and brushed splinters of glass off his suit.

"I hadn't expected that in broad daylight," he told himself. "There's sure somebody doesn't want me nosing around in here, and that has to mean that if there's a treasure at least he didn't get to it yet."

There was no way for him to tell exactly where the bullet fired at him had come from. It could have been fired in or near any one of half a dozen houses. For the moment he didn't even try to locate the slug and dig it out of the wall. Chief Gentry's boys could take care of that little chore later on.

The first thing Shayne did was make a tour of the big house. It was discouraging. There were a lot of rooms and all of them were full of furniture, collectible items and just plain hoarded junk.

There were two big, expensive freezer units in the kitchen and another in the back hall on the ground floor. All three were jammed full of food, much of it labeled as expen-

sive cuts of meat. Shayne noted two ten-pound packages of frozen lobster tails.

"He must have thought he'd stand siege in here," the big man told the empty room. "Enough food here so he could eat himself to death before anybody broke in."

Shayne knew that to search the house properly he'd have to thaw all that food. Suppose the old man had frozen a packet of hundred-dollar bills in with the lobster tails? It would take an army of men weeks to shake this place down properly. In the end the house might have to be taken apart stone by stone and timber by timber.

For the moment Shayne contented himself with tapping on walls and floors, looking for a sliding panel or hidden compartment. He didn't find anything. He hadn't really expected that he would.

When he left the house he took a suitcase full of old books and locked it in the trunk of his own car. "If that guy shot at me is still watching he may think I've got the stuff I was after and follow me. If he does, I'll get him sooner or later."

His next stop was at the address Gentry had given him for Calvin Harris. It was an apartment in a big old boomtime building. The paint was peeling and the door and window frames rotten with termite tunnels, but the rent was cheap and the rooms high-ceilinged and cool in the south Florida summer heat.

Mike Shayne spotted a police stake-out, a plainclothes detective sitting in an unmarked car watching the building, so he figured Harris probably hadn't come home yet.

He was right. The apartment door was opened by an attractive young woman who admitted to being Mrs. Sally Harris. She wasn't about to admit anything else, though.

Shayne gave her an appreciative grin. This young woman would have been a real stunner with new clothes and a few square meals to fill out her figure. He could see that times had been hard with the Harris family.

"No," she said, "Cal ain't here. I don't know where he is and I have no idea when he's coming back. Now will you get out of here and leave us alone?"

"What are you so mad at me for?" Shayne asked. "You don't even know who I am. Maybe I just want to help Cal."

"In a pig's ear," she said and gave him a bold and hostile look. "Nobody wants to help Cal. You're just another one of them fly cops been coming around all day."

"I'm not a cop."

"If you ain't a cop what are you here for? I tell you Cal didn't kill old John. Not that he didn't need killing, the way he treated people all his life, but Cal didn't do it. I ought to know Cal. He's my man. He ain't the killing kind."

"In that case he's got nothing to worry about."

"You oughta know better than

that," she said. "Poor folks like us have always got things to worry about. Anything happens like that old S.O.B. gets himself killed—who do the cops come after? Not old Jane Mullen. She's got some money. Not any of the rich folks old John cheated. No. It's a poor boy crippled up by that old devil's meanness. You think I'm going to help you hound my man, mister, you're crazy in the head."

Her voice had a ring of sincerity that impressed Mike Shayne. The big man had dealt with enough hundreds of thieves and killers in his time to have developed a pretty reliable instinct for judging people. In spite of her obvious hostility, he liked this young woman.

"Now look," he said. "I told you I'm not a cop. I might even be able to help you and Cal. Why not let me come in and talk about it?"

"The cops have already searched this place looking for Cal. He ain't here."

"I believe you. I said I just want to talk. I might even make you a business proposition."

"That would be the day," she said. "I ain't open to no proposition."

"Not you," he said. "Cal." He took a twenty-dollar bill out of his wallet and gave it to her. "That's earnest money. If Cal can help me, there'll be more. Look, my name's Mike Shayne. You can check me out. People will tell you I'm no phony."

"Oh," she said. "Mike Shayne, huh? I heard about you. Okay, I guess there's no harm talking." She tucked the bill into the front of her dress and opened the door wider to let him in.

The apartment was bare, but scrupulously clean. Shayne sat down in one of the two living room chairs, took off his battered felt hat and mopped his brow.

Sally Harris sat in the other chair.

"Okay, Mr. Shayne," she said. "It's your dime. Go ahead and talk."

"I will get to the point," Mike Shayne said. "We both know your husband's in trouble. He had reason to hate Wingren and everybody knows it. The police want him. There's an A.P.B. out for him right now. That means sooner or later they'll find him. Then it'll be all the tougher because he didn't come in on his own. Hiding out always makes a man look guilty."

"Well, suppose all that's true? Then what can my Cal do?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell

you. He can get in touch with me. I think he can help me." Shayne gave her one of his business cards.

"When you talk to him tell him he can call me at these numbers. Or he can come see me. I'll be at the Wingren house most of the evening. I'll watch for him. And I promise not to turn him in to the police if he isn't guilty of murder. I don't think he is, but if I'm wrong he can just stay away from me."

"Cal didn't do murder, mister. Still, I don't understand. Help you with what? What can the likes of him do for you?"

Shayne took a chance. "I've been hired to look for money the old man was supposed to have hid out in his house. Your man knows the house. He worked for the old man and maybe knows how he thought. He can help me find what I'm after. If we do find it, I'll see that Cal gets a part of my share. If we don't I'll pay him wages."

Sally Harris still hesitated.

"Look," Shayne said, "if you've heard of me, you know I'm Will Gentry's friend. I promise you as long as Cal's working for me I won't let him be arrested. How's that?"

He could see that that brought her to some sort of a decision.

"Okay," she said. "If Cal talks to me I'll tell him what you said. What he does then is up to him. You understand that?"

"I understand. That is fair enough."

"Okay, but one thing more." Her low voice throbbed with the intensity of utter sincerity. "My Cal, he's had enough bad breaks. Crippled and out of work like he is. You treat him right, Mr. Shayne. Because if you don't—if you cheat him like old man John did, or sell him to the cops, or hurt him any way at all—I swear to God, mister, you won't get away with it. I'll watch and I'll get you. I'll kill you myself. I want you should know that right here and now. I'll kill you myself."

"I understand. You can trust me," Shayne said.

"I better be able to trust you. Else I'll kill you."

VI

BY NOW IT was well along in the afternoon and Mike Shayne was hungry. He hadn't really eaten since breakfast, and on this particular day breakfast had been mostly coffee and brandy.

He found a neighborhood restaurant and ordered a double order of pork chops and hashed brown potatoes and a half of an apple pie. The food wasn't very good but it was hot and filling, and eating gave him time to think.

He knew this was going to be a difficult case. Instead of having to go out and hunt for a suspect, he already had an overload of them. Everybody he'd run into all day was a suspect except Anna Wingren and Will Gentry. Even Anna could have felt she stood to gain her in-

heritance when her grandfather was dead. That left Chief Gentry.

Worst of all, from the detective's point of view, it was probable that most of the neighbors not only had motive but also opportunity to have committed the crime. Any one of them could have sneaked up and broken into the big house the night before.

On top of all that Shayne knew that his primary job of finding the old miser's hidden treasure would be almost impossible to accomplish without help. The only right way to go about it would be to take every one of the thousands of items piled around the big house and examine it separately. That meant taking it apart. Old John might have bought diamonds and hid them one by one, or put thousand-dollar bills between the pages of books or magazines. Shayne had no way of knowing. After that the whole house would have to be dismantled. That would take months.

The only way to find the stuff was by just plain luck, or with the help of somebody who knew where to look.

That somebody had to be the killer.

Mike Shayne figured the murderer hadn't got away with the treasure, at least not all of it. Otherwise why would he have tried to kill the detective that afternoon? If he had the money, he'd be long gone out of town.

On the other hand, why set a fire and leave the house the night before? Why not stay and search for the hoard?

Somebody knew the answers to all the difficult questions in this case. Shayne meant to make that someone come to him and then get the answers for himself. His next job was to set the trap and see that the killer smelled the bait.

When he left the restaurant Shayne went straight to Jane Mullen's house. This time he had to really pound on the door before the old woman opened it about halfway.

"What do you want?" she said in a peevish tone. "I already talked to you once."

Shayne gave the door a hard shove that opened it wide and stepped into the room.

"I know you talked to me," he told her. "Now let's do it all over again, only suppose this time you tell me the truth."

"I told you the truth."

"Oh, no, you didn't. Why didn't you tell me you were over at John Wingren's house last night?"

"You didn't ask," she protested feebly.

Shayne didn't even honor that with an answer.

"Why you people lie like you do is past me," he said. "You ought to know your own neighbors. Somebody sees everything you do. You can't sneeze without somebody makes a note, and they talk. I know you were over there, and I know

you and the old man had an awful fight."

"Who says we did?"

"People who saw you and heard you." The big man wasn't averse to stretching the point a bit. "People who'll swear you were beating him up. They'll go on the witness stand and swear it."

"Then they'll lie," she said.

"You can say that to me," Shayne said. "I'm not a judge. I'm not a tough state's attorney throwing questions at you. Oh, you can lie to me easily enough, Mrs. Mullen. But when your own neighbors get on the stand and throw those lies in your teeth, what can you do then? Can you lie to a jury? Well enough so a jury will believe you? Can you do that and will you bet your life that you can?"

"It ain't no lie," she yelled back at him. Her old face was contorted with a mixture of anger and fear. "I don't care what nobody says. I didn't kill John and I didn't beat him up. How could I? An old woman an like me—"

"Suppose you tell me what you did do then," Shayne pressed her. "You were in the house all right. Don't you try to deny that. If it wasn't what they say, you better tell me now, and tell me the truth. Mind you. The truth."

"All right," she said. "I suppose I might as well. No telling what them lying neighbors will do to me if I don't. I was up to the house, Mr. Shayne. It was early in the evening. Right after dark it was and John was alive when I got there and when I left."

"You're sure of that?"

"Of course I am. It wasn't me shot him, Mr. Shayne. I got no gun anyway."

"Oh," Shayne said. "So it wasn't you that shot him. What do you know about his being shot?"

"Because that's why he called me up there, you tarnation fool. Why do you think he'd let me in the house unless he was hurt first?"

"I don't know," Shayne said. "You tell me."

"He came down here and told me to come. He needed help. I went back up to the house with him. He said somebody shot at him through the window. They missed him but the shot hit the heavy iron fire dog in the upstairs library and part of the bullet broke off and hit him in the back.

"I looked and sure enough there was a hole in his back. Twarn't bleeding much though. I told him he needed a doctor. All he'd done was tie a towel around himself to stop the bleeding. He wouldn't listen. Said he didn't trust no doctor and one would charge him a fortune for tying up the wound, which I could do just as well."

"The bullet was in his liver," Shayne said. "Sooner or later it would have killed him unless a doctor took it out."

"I thought something like that. I tried to tell him. The stingy old

fool wouldn't listen. That's what we were hollering at each other about. I got real mad. I said he'd cheated me often enough. He could call a doctor now or die. I didn't care."

"But you didn't think about helping him die?"

"Of course I didn't. We was in the upstairs bath where he kept the medicine chest. I started to leave. He ran at me on the stairs to stop me and somehow he slipped and fell down to the landing. That's all happened. I went on out. He was laying there cussing and groaning, but he sure wasn't dead."

Mike Shayne had a pretty good notion that old John Wingren might have been pushed down the stairs rather than "slipped and fell" but he wasn't going to make a point of it right then.

The rest of the old woman's story sounded reasonable to him, even the part about the wound feeling much less dangerous to the old man than it actually was. Besides, if she hadn't been telling the truth, she probably never would have admitted knowing anything at all about the shooting part. That wasn't the sort of story an old woman of her type would be likely to make up out of whole cloth.

"Suppose I believe you," he said to her. "Not that I'm sure I do, but just suppose."

"You better believe it," she said. "I swear it's the truth."

"People swear all sorts of things to me," Shayne said. "They been

doing it for years. Did old John know who shot him?"

"He said he did, but he didn't tell me. Said he'd settle that young feller's hash by himself."

"You sure he said a young feller?"

"Them was his exact words," she insisted. " 'I'll settle that young feller's hash' was his exact words."

"Do you know if he had money of his in the house?"

"Everybody always said he had," Mrs. Mullen said, "but Lord knows I never seen none. If he had it, then it was well hid for sure."

"You say everybody thought he had it, though."

"Sure. You know how people talk. You do believe me, don't you, Mr. Shayne? I didn't kill that mean old man. Maybe I thought about it a few times in the years gone, but

I'm not a woman could go ahead and kill."

"Well," Shayne said, "do you have any idea who old John meant when he said 'young feller?' Has anybody you know been hanging around here lately? Acting suspicious? Anything like that?"

"Not like you mean, Mr. Shayne," she said. "Of course there's been young Cal Harris, but everybody knows what he's doing."

"I don't," Shayne said. "What does he do?"

"Oh, three — four times every week he comes by here and puts a curse on the old man. Course he don't say, but we all know that's it. He comes hobbling up the street on them two canes of his and just stands and looks at the big house with his face all black and hard. Cursing old John he was for sure."

Shayne thought: "No wonder the cops are after that boy." Aloud, all he said was: "Anything else?"

"Not unless you count Crazy Smith's prowlers."

"Who are they?"

"Lord knows. Old Corporal Smith says he sees them prowling all through here in the dark of the moon. Murdering, thieving robbers he calls them. Once in a while he even takes a shot at them with that old army gun of his. Never hit none, though. Not far's I know anyhow."

"Doesn't anybody call the police when he shoots at things?"

"Lord no, Mr. Shayne. Ain't no harm in old Buck. He just sees things. No crime in that."

"Have you ever seen these prowlers? Last night for instance?" Shayne pressed her.

She turned her face away. "No. sir. I told you all I know about last night. You better believe me too, because it's the Lord's living truth. Every bit of it. Now go on and get out of here. Let an old woman get time to fix herself some supper. Get out now."

Shayne could tell that was all she was going to say, so he left the house and walked across the street to old Buck Smith's place.

The old veteran was in the kitchen boiling up grits and collard greens with fat pork. He let Shayne follow him back and sit at the kitchen table while he continued his cooking.

"Have a glass of cold buttermilk, Mr. Shayne," he offered.

On his way to the kitchen Shayne had noticed that the old man's Springfield rifle was missing from its place in the front room.

Mike Shayne accepted the buttermilk. He didn't want it, but the gesture would relax the old man.

"I've just been talking to Mrs. Mullen," he said. "She says you protect the block from prowlers."

"I do what I can," old Buck said. "Somebody's got to watch out these days with all the young ones taking dope and fornicating out of wedlock and such like. Somebody got to be on the watch."

"Too bad you didn't see the killer go in or out of the big house last night," Mike Shayne said casually.

Buck Smith was spooning out grits onto his plate. The big iron spoon clattered against his plate and he almost dropped it. At first Shayne thought the old man was going to faint. Then he pulled himself together.

"No, sir," he said. "I sure didn't. Man can't be watching all the time. Dunno if I'd a done anything if I had. Oh, if I'd known it was a killer, then sure. But just a thief. Let him help himself. Old John had plenty and to spare."

"You didn't like him?"

"Nobody liked old John. A mean, grasping, hateful old scoundrel he was."

"It's a good thing somebody was watching last night," Shayne said. "If he hadn't raised the alarm before the house really caught. Some of your other houses might have burned too in that case."

"I heard on the radio," Buck said. "Funny it was that young Smulka raised the alarm. He got no cause to love old John either."

Here we go again, Shayne thought. He said: "What do you mean by that?"

"Didn't he tell you? Well, maybe he had no real reason not to let sleeping dogs lie."

"Tell us what?"

"Why, twenty years back his old man and John was partners in a construction firm. This feller was just a boy then. Well, the firm failed but old John got his money out first like he always done. It was Smulka was ruined. Shot himself over it, he did. There'd been some hanky-panky on Wingren's part, and Smulka might have gone to prison even."

"No," Shayne said. "He didn't tell anybody about that. Not that I know of."

"Like I say, maybe he felt no cause to."

"What I came to say," Shayne said, "if you see anybody in that big house tonight it's me. So don't fire that cannon of yours. I have been hired by old man Wingren's granddaughter Anna to stay there a night or two and keep any more prowlers out."

"Have some grits and greens," Smith offered hospitably. "I suppose you mean keep prowlers out if they come looking for old John's treasure. That there wicked old man lived up there with his stolen money. They'll be coming for it now."

"What money?" Shayne asked.

"All that he stole, of course," Smith said. "Diamonds and rubies and gold pieces and the money he wrung out of widows and working men by usury and cheating. Like an old spider he was those years, sucking the blood and the money out of everyone's veins."

Old Buck Smith's eyes glittered with a fanatic light. "They'll be coming for it now. They and their ghosts. That old house will be full of them. You watch out, Mr. Shayne.

They'll be coming. Just like the devil come for old John's soul last night. I seen him, Mr. Shayne, with his horns up black against the moon."

VII

MIKE SHAYNE went back up to the old Wingren house. This time he didnt' need a key for the front door. but just reached through the gaping hole where the glass had fallen out and turned the knob. The first thing he did was to correct that situation. He found some boards in the garage as well as a tool chest and nailed them over the inside of the door. At least anyone coming after him that night would have to break in.

Unfortunately that would be hard to prevent. Like so many old boom-time Miami mansions this one had several doors on the ground floor leading out to the grounds. They all had locks and chains, but nothing that would prevent a serious problem to a professional thief.

There was an old, brindled grey cat on the back steps. She wouldn't come into the house, but lingered by an empty plate set there and obviously expected to be fed. Shayne put out scraps from the refrigerator and a dish of water.

"The old devil must have had at least one soft spot," he said to the cat. "I guess you would have been it. Well, we never know."

The cat accepted the food and drink with an air of regal condescension and then padded silently away into the dusk.

The electricity was still connected throughout the house and Shayne turned on lights in the upper and lower halls and in whichever room he was in at the moment.

He didn't light up the whole building or turn on any exterior lights. It was part of the plan he'd formed that the killer should be able to get back into the building without too much trouble. Too many blazing lights might have scared him off.

Shayne was sure that by now everyone for blocks around would be sure that he was spending the night inside the house and also that he would be looking for hidden treasure.

Unless the killer had already made off with the treasure—and every instinct told Shayne that he hadn't—that would prove a bait that couldn't be resisted.

Shayne went back into the living room for the first time since that afternoon. When he turned on the light the three stuffed animal heads stared solemnly down at him from above the mantel. Shayne looked again. Someone had pinned a sheet of yellow note-paper to the nose of the moose in the middle.

He went over and pulled it down. Someone had printed a message in crude block letters, using a red crayon for a pencil.

"MIK SHAIN," the message read, "GET OUT. I DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO KILL YOU."

"Sorry, friend," Shayne said to the ugly face of the moose. "I don't want to be killed either, but I can't get out of here just yet."

There was no way of telling who had written the message. Anyone could have gotten into the house easily enough while he was gone during the afternoon. The paper had been wiped clean of any fingerprints or smudges he could have spotted without dusting professionally. He folded it and put it in his pocket.

Then he sat down, being careful to pick a chair that was out of line with the windows, so he couldn't be watched from outside the house.

It was just getting dark, the brief tropic dusk that would last only minutes. He didn't expect any attack until full dark had fallen. This would be a good time to do some hard thinking.

The thing that had him puzzled him the most was the fire that had been set inside the house the night before.

The fire department had positively identified it as arson. It was the old trick of a candle set to burn down and ignite kerosene-soaked rags. There wasn't a chance in the world of this one being accidental.

Then - why had it been set? Shayne would have expected the killer to spend the balance of the night hunting for the treasure. In that case the last thing he'd do would be to set a fire that would attract outside attention. And suppose it hadn't attracted attention, but had really set the big house ablaze. *Pouf*. Up would go the treasure in smoke along with everything else. Why take a chance like that?

Maybe the killer had already found the treasure and just wanted to cover his tracks and destroy all evidence. That would make sense. but not in connection with the shot fired at him that afternoon and the note left pinned to the nose of the stuffed moose head. Both those things indicated that the killer was still very much in the picture and wanted Shayne out of the way so he could get at the business of finding the money.

Either that or the killer was an utterly insane person whose actions were not limited by reason.

"None of it makes sense," Shayne said to the uncaring moose. "On the other hand I know there must be a reason back of it all. If I could just see what it is." Once again he tried to put himself in the place of the killer and think as that person must have done.

It didn't work.

Then he heard the noise of steps outside the window. He was out of his chair like a flash, gun out and ready in his hand. The steps went past the window. They were unsteady and shuffling. Shayne began to relax.

When the knock on the front door came, Mike Shayne was in the hallway waiting.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"It's me, Mr. Shayne," someone said in low tones outside the door. "Cal Harris. Sally said I should talk to you."

"All right," the big redhead said. "Come in fast when I open the door."

He turned the key and opened the door just enough for the young man to enter. Cal couldn't move very fast. To walk at all he had to use two heavy oak canes. That accounted for the shuffling noise his feet had made outside the window.

"Stand still." Shayne said. He frisked the man expertly. Outside of the canes he had no weapon more effective than a pocket knife with a two-inch blade.

"Why did you come?" Shayne asked.

"Sally said I could trust you," Cal Harris said. "Mister, we both figured that right now I need somebody I can trust."

"You do indeed," Shayne said. "Come into the main room here and sit down. Now, first of all, did you kill the old man?' '

"Only if wishes could do it," Cal Harris said. "I admit I hated him like everybody did, but I didn't kill him. I don't care what nobody says. I wasn't in this place last night."

He said that last so emphatically that Shayne decided to take a chance. "You were seen here," he said.

"I know," Cal Harris admitted. "Why do you think I ran and hid out? I was only on the grass outside, though, when old Buck saw me and shot at me. I was never in the house."

Shayne thought hard. "Where was Buck when he shot at you?"

"Over across the street on his porch. I seen the muzzle flash when he fired, and I ducked around the corner."

"Come on," Shayne said. "I want to see about something." He was remembering what Jane Mullen had told him earlier.

They went upstairs to the big bedroom where John Wingren had slept. Sure enough there was a small round hole in the window screen, and he could see where the projectile had struck the iron fire dog in the fireplace. A smear of lead and a chip in the iron marked the spot of ricochet.

"Buck Smith's been lying to me because he thought he shot John Wingren when he fired at you," Mike Shayne said. "But the old man was shot in this room through that window. No shot fired from Smith's house could possibly have done it."

Cal Harris was silent. He just watched and listened.

The big man got down and put his head by the mark on the firedog. He sighted from there to the hole in the window screen.

"Near as I can make out," he said, "the shot that hit Wingren had to come from up in that big oak tree out there."

The mass of the tree's foliage showed as a dark blur against the reflected lights in the sky.

"Right from that tree," Shayne said.

He saw the muzzle flash in the midst of the foliage and threw himself sideways and down on the floor. Even Shayne with his catlike, almost instant reflexes would have been too slow, if the sniper's aim had been better. As it was, he swore afterwards he'd felt the wind of the bullet on his cheek.

Cal Harris swung one of his heavy canes and knocked the table lamp which Shayne had lit to the floor of the room, where the bulb smashed.

"Don't move," Shayne shouted. "With the light off he can't see in here."

He himself crawled swiftly to the window and peered over the sill. The tree from which the shot had come was a big one with low-hanging branches and bushes around its base. The sniper, whoever he was, could have dropped down easily out of sight of the window and made his escape in safety.

Shayne put his gun back in its holster.

"From now on we better stay away from windows," he told Harris.

"Now you know I didn't do any killing," Cal Harris said. "I sure couldn't have fired that shot."

"I never did think you were guilty," the detective said. "But this doesn't prove anything except that if you did kill the old buzzard you had an accomplice. That, or maybe somebody else is cutting himself in on the act now."

"I didn't think of that," Harris said in a discouraged tone. "I am innocent."

"You don't have to argue it with me," Shayne said. "I don't believe you're the killer type. We've got to get busy and prove out a couple of things though."

"Won't somebody have heard that shot and call the police? What do I do then?"

"You leave the worrying about that to me. That shot was from a small caliber gun, probably a twenty-two. I barely heard it myself, and people around here seem to have wax in their ears when it comes to gunshots."

"Then what do we do?" Harris asked.

"Partly we wait for him to come in after us. He may think that shot got me. If he does, he won't wait long coming after you. That is, if he knows you're here. Anyway, there's something in here he wants. It might be evidence he left last night, but I think more likely it's old Wingren's money. Whichever, it'll bring him in."

"I haven't any weapon," Cal Harris said.

"You don't need the kind of weapon you're thinking about. I can do any shooting for both of us. I need the weapon you don't know you have."

"I don't understand."

"I'll spell it out," Shayne said. "What we need now is your brains. You knew old John. I didn't. You've been in and out of this place a lot while he was alive. You know things about what sort of man he was, how he thought, how his mind worked—things like that."

"I don't know," Harris said. "I think you're giving me more credit than I deserve. Old John was a mean, cruel man. He never told a man like me how he thought of things or how his mind worked. He was just mean."

"You're right," the redhead said. "He wouldn't have told you a thing if he knew that was what he was doing. He told you without knowing it. Little things. Things he didn't know he was giving away. Now tell me, boy — fast — where would he hide his treasure?"

"Uh. I—don't—"

"Fast. Tell me."

"In the big room downstairs," Harris blurted out.

"Fine. Fine. Let's go down there now."

They went through the hall, where Shayne left the single bulb burning and down the wide flight of stairs. In the living room the detective turned off the light. Enough reflected light from the city came in through the windows so that they could make out essential details once their eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkess. Anyone coming up to the windows from outside would be instantly visible from within.

"Now, you tell me why you said this room," Shayne said.

"I don't know. It just came to mind."

"I realize that. But why this particular room?"

"Well," Cal Harris said hesitantly, "I guess maybe because it was his favorite room. He spent most of his time in here. Sometimes he even slept down here on the couch or even in a chair. He made me come early to work for him and when I'd knock he was always in here already."

"So this was his favorite room. That's good thinking. Go on from there."

"Okay," said an encouraged Cal Harris. "Now he was such a mean man he wouldn't trust nobody or

nothing. If he did hide something that meant a lot to him, like money, it would be where he could keep an eye on it. Leastwise where he could keep an eye on the hiding place. Otherwise he'd always be worried that somebody had got to it. Anyway, that's what I think."

"I think you've got a good head on your shoulders," the detective told him. "Everything I've learned about human nature agrees with your line of thought. Now let's take it one step further."

"I'm sorry, I didn't hear you," Harris said. At the moment Shayne had spoken a big airliner, gaining altitude as it took off from the Miami Airport, had thundered by low over the house. The roar had drowned out the words.

"When the wind's a certain way them things go over here one after the other like a train of cars," Harris explained when they could hear again.

"I said take your line of thought a step further," Shayne said. "If he hid something in this room, what sort of hiding place would it be? A safe in the wall? Under the floor?"

"Neither of them," Harris said. "Leastwise not in this here room. I painted this one last time it were done and there's not any hiding places back of them walls. I had to scrape old wallpaper off every inch and I ought to know. Not under the floors neither. Them had to be sanded down and varnished. I'd have located any such places even though I wasn't looking for them."

"I guess you would," said a disappointed Shayne. "So now think hard and try to put yourself in the old man's place. If you were him, now where would you hide something in here?"

They both sat quietly for several minutes, peering about the cluttered room in the semi-darkness.

That's how they came to hear the footsteps coming up through the yard toward the windows.

Whoever was walking out there was trying very hard not to make any noise. At times the steps ceased completely as the prowler either stopped moving entirely or hit a patch of soft grass. Unfortunately for the two he stayed away from the windows.

Cal Harris eased himself over very quietly to where Shayne sat. "I can go in the dining room and see out the windows there," he whispered.

Shayne nodded. "Be careful. Don't let him see you," he whispered back.

He himself wanted to stay in the room which probably held the hidden treasure. He figured that would be the room the prowler would most likely head for first and he preferred having Cal Harris out of the way in case of a fight.

Mike Shayne himself got quietly out of the chair where he'd been sitting and eased over to the window. Behind him he was barely able to hear Cal Harris leaving the room.

In spite of his two canes, the partly crippled boy moved like a shadow. Once he was in the hall it was impossible to hear him at all.

By the time the big detective got to the window the prowler outside was out of sight behind some flowering bougainvillea vines and hibiscus bushes that grew against the old house to the left of the living room windows.

Shayne strained his ears, but just at that moment one of the big jetliners went roaring overhead. The sound he'd been trying to hear was somehow drowned out. He knew instinctively that it had been important, but there wasn't a thing he could do about it.

By the time he could hear again the footsteps outside the house had stopped. The prowler might have moved on, or merely be standing still. There was no way he could find out without leaving the house himself, and he didn't want to do that. Instead he stayed right where he was. He could watch all entrances to this particular room until Cal Harris got back.

That set him to wondering. The crippled young man should have had time to look out the window of the adjoining room and be back by now. He strained his ears again. but it was impossible to hear anything but the muted voice of the city night like a background murmur.

Cal Harris had definitely been gone too long. Shayne wondered if he'd done right to trust his hunch and trust the young man to begin with. Maybe Harris had known where the money was hidden and taken the opportunity when he and Shayne were separated to go and get it.

The big man had a strong conviction that wasn't so. He liked both Cal and Sally Harris from the start, and his ability to judge character had seldom played him false over the years. Still, he knew he'd be a fool not to check up and find out for sure.

His eyes were by now so accustomed to the dim light that he was able to move about the cluttered living room as silently as a drifting leaf in the wind.

Once he got into the hall he wished he hadn't left the one small bulb burning on the stair landing. It let him see, but his eyes would have to readjust again when he got into another of the darkened rooms. He found the switch and killed that light, then paused a moment to get used to the dark again.

Another plane was roaring above the house. Shayne wished they'd use another flight pattern for a while. He was beginning to realize he'd need all five senses unobstructed to survive at all in this eerie house. A sense of indefinable but tangible menace was growing in his brain and body.

When the plane had passed he listened again. As far as his still partly deafened ears could detect,

nothing was moving anywhere in the big house.

Shayne moved quietly down the hall to the door that led into the dining room. It was closed and no sound came from behind the panel. He touched the doorknob and turned it slowly so as to make no sound at all. Then he pushed the door open, stepped swiftly inside and to the side of the door. Every sense was alert to detect the slightest sign of danger.

There was none.

He looked around the room. It, too, was cluttered with furniture and even objects piled on the floor. The top of the big old dining table of carved Haitian mahogany was so littered that in the semi-dark it was like a bargain counter in one of the cheap tourist-trap stores on south Miami Beach.

Everything was there but the one thing Mike Shayne wanted to see. There wasn't a sign anywhere of young Cal Harris. There wasn't even the sound of his breathing, which should have been audible in the intervals when no plane was passing overhead.

Shayne didn't try to call out. If Harris had been ambushed and killed or taken captive, the killer might still be lurking in this very room.

He would know Mike Shayne was in the house. The big man had gone to enough trouble spreading that word during the afternoon. He

hadn't expected the killer to be one step ahead of him, however.

Or was his first suspicion correct? Had Cal Harris made a bee line for the hidden treasure as soon as he left Shayne?

The redhead started a fast circuit of the room. He was watching for any sign of Cal Harris' body. He was fully alert to counter any sudden movement within the room which might presage an attack. He was alert and prepared for anything —at least he thought he was.

His right foot came down on something hard that rolled and twisted under his weight. That foot shot out from under him.

He twisted his big body violently and flailed his arms to regain balance. In the dark one fist hit something that fell over with a crash. He twisted again to break his fall and

then found himself on the floor half jammed under the big table.

The whole house shook as another climbing jet went out to sea right over its roof.

VIII

MIKE SHAYNE got his gun out in an instant—half groggy as he was. Nothing happened. Nobody attacked him. The rest of the house was still as silent as it had been before his fall.

"Of all the damned fools," he told himself. "Ready for anything. Bah."

He groped about on the floor until he located the cause of his downfall. When he saw what it was his heart sank another notch.

He'd stepped on one of Cal Harris' two heavy canes.

That meant Harris hadn't deserted him and gone to look for the treasure. The cripple would never have left his cane just lying there on the floor. He needed both of them to move about at all easily.

There was only one conclusion. The killer was already in the house and had ambushed Cal. When Harris came into the room, he'd been bushwhacked and killed or taken prisoner.

Since Shayne couldn't locate the body, he decided the young man must be a captive. That rearranged the detective's whole priority list of objectives.

The first thing he had to do now was find and rescue Cal Harris. He was sure the killer would have had only one possible reason for taking the boy away with him, to torture him and force out of him whatever he might know about the hidden money.

If Cal Harris told, it would be the same as signing his own death warrant. If he couldn't or wouldn't give out any information to help the killer, it would probably amount to the same thing. This killer wouldn't be the one to leave behind a live witness who might identify him at some future date.

Everything Shayne had learned so far tagged this one as smart, aggressive and utterly ruthless, not a man to take chances or leave loose ends lying around under any circumstances whatever.

Well, he wouldn't find Harris by staying on the dining room floor. He had to get out of there and search the entire house. That wasn't going to be easy or safe with a killer waiting and ready for him.

Shayne crawled over to the door and reached up to the knob. He opened the door with one swift motion and stuck his head out at floor level. It was a trick he'd used before in a tight place, and it had saved his life more than once.

Anybody waiting in ambush outside the door would expect the big man to walk out, not crawl. From a prone position Shayne could have spotted his feet, grabbed for the ankles and brought the man down

while he was still peering into the open door for the bulk of a standing man. Once a killer had even fired two shots into the empty air where Shayne's stomach would have been.

This time there was nobody in the hall. When Mike Shayne was sure of that he got to his own feet. He was holding Harris' heavy cane, and had his big forty-five loose in the holster and ready for instant use if needed.

The worst part of the whole situation was that he had no idea at all where to start searching. There were at least six rooms on the ground floor where he stood, and two more stories above. The killer might be holding Cal in any of the rooms—and any one was so crowded and cluttered as to offer a fine setting for an ambush in the dark.

If the detective just went blundering about in the dark, he stood a very good chance of meeting the same fate as the young fellow had. If he tried turning on lights, he'd just alert the killer for sure as to his own whereabouts.

At that point Shayne wished old John Wingren hadn't been too miserly to keep a phone. He wished he could put in a call to his friend Will Gentry to have the house surrounded by police so the killer's escape would be cut off.

He didn't dare leave the house long enough to find another phone and call for help.

Shayne decided to search the ground floor first. He didn't think the killer had had time to carry Cal Harris' unconscious body very far. He'd probably known that Mike Shayne was also in the house and been afraid of being surprised himself at any moment.

Of course he'd want to get the body out of the room where the attack had taken place.

Shayne was pretty sure he'd have heard the sounds of anything heavy being carried up to the second floor. The stairway was an old one and a couple of the treads were loose and creaky. It could have been done while one of the planes was overhead, but he doubted it.

The dining room was between the living room and kitchen on the left side of the hall as a person walked in from the street. There was what had probably been a butler's pantry between it and the kitchen, but this was so narrow and so cluttered as to be little more than a hallway.

Shayne went on down the main hall toward the rear of the house. The door from the hall to the kitchen was open, and he went inside.

The first thing he checked was the door from the kitchen to the small porch at the rear of the house. That door was locked with its key and also secured by a heavy brass drawbolt. No one could have gone out that way and shot the bolt from the outside.

As a matter of routine Shayne checked the passage through what

had been the butler's pantry. It was empty.

There was another big storage pantry or closet. Again a quick inspection showed it empty of everything except stacked cases and canned and bottled food, boxes of soaps and detergents and similar items. Old Wingren had enough stuff hoarded away to live for months without setting foot outside of his home.

There was another door set flush with the wall, back where the bulk of one of the big freezer units kept it in heavy shadow. Shayne didn't want to turn on a light, and as a result he almost missed seeing that door.

He tried the knob. The door wasn't locked. He pulled it open and stuck his head in. He knew instantly that this wasn't just another closet. His head was in darkness, but it was a darkness full of smells and the sound of water dripping some distance away. A draft blew outward as he stood in the door, and he realized there must be a cellar of some considerable size—an unusual thing to find in an older type Miami home.

He still couldn't see a thing. He stepped inside, this time being careful to slide his feet at floor level. His hand touched a wooden rail as he groped in the dark. He couldn't see a thing.

Somebody could, though.

The only warning Mike Shayne had was from instinct. He didn't hear anything or see anything. As long as he lived he'd never know what primal, purely sub-sensory impulse it was that made him flinch and try to draw back.

Whatever it was—it saved his life.

The piece of heavy iron pipe struck a glancing blow on the side of his head instead of a spine-shattering smash at the nape of the neck as it had been intended to do. The difference in point of impact was all-important.

For Mike Shayne, at the moment, it was no difference at all though. The skyrockets exploded inside his skull and then he went down into the deep, dark well of unconsciousness.

Dimly, in a far corner of the brain he felt himself kicked or tumbled down a short flight of steps. At the same time he thought he heard a voice calling, not nearby but a long way off. Then the pain rose to crescendo and the merciful blackness took its place.

When he began to struggle back up the long, long spiral stairway to full consciousness it was because of a thumping, a moaning, and a persistent tapping against the upper left hand part of his back.

At first he didn't really want to wake up. It meant going back into and through all that pain again. Mike Shayne was a hard man to kill, though. He was even harder to put down and keep down. Way deep inside he knew that he had to come back to consciousness, and so he

did it bit by bit and second by second.

His hands and feet were tied with what felt like clothes line and he was lying on his face on a dirty cement floor in complete blackness. A heel was jabbing at his shoulder and the moaning, mumbling sound he heard was someone trying to talk to him through a gag.

Shayne opened his mouth and groaned. To his immense surprise he realized that he wasn't gagged.

"Stop kicking me," he said to the darkness. "I'll be all right again in a minute. Then I'll see about getting loose."

The inarticulate sounds redoubled in frequency and volume.

Shayne was thinking again.

"Stop that or you'll choke," he said. "Are you Cal Harris? If you are rap on the floor three times with your feet."

He was answered by three raps.

Shayne managed to sit up. Whoever had tied him had done a careless job of it. Not only had he forgotten to gag the big man, but he'd used old and half-rotted clothesline instead of wire or strong cord.

The big man began to feel better. Given time, he was confident that he could work himself loose again.

First he managed to crawl over to where Cal Harris lay. It wasn't easy in the dark but he got his head at the back of the boy's neck. Some cloth had been stuffed in his mouth for a gag and then another piece of

rag knotted at the back of the neck to hold the gag in place. Shayne worried that knot with his teeth until it came loose.

Then Harris was able to spit out the gag.

"Mr. Shayne," he said, "I thought you'd never find me."

"You were almost right," Shayne said. "Why didn't you bump or something to warn me when I opened the door?"

"He had a knife. Besides, I couldn't be sure it was you."

"What are you tied up with?"

"It feels like picture wire," Cal Harris said.

"Then you better work on me," Shayne said. "If we could sit up back to back you can get your fingers on the cord around my hands."

"I can do better than that," Harris said. "I'm lying on top of what feels like a Coke bottle."

"Good boy," Shayne said.

With much difficulty they man-

aged to get into a sitting position, back to back. Shayne took the Coke bottle and managed to break it on the cement floor. After that Harris sawed at the bonds around Shayne's wrists with a piece of the broken glass.

It was slow and chancy work. Harris had to be very careful not to cut Mike Shayne's wrists.

"How did he get you?" Shayne asked as he worked.

"He was waiting in the dining room by the door. When I came in he grabbed me. I tried to yell but there was a plane going over."

"So there was. I couldn't hear you. How did he get in there ahead of you from outside?"

"He didn't," Harris said. "He was there already. I remember I could still hear somebody moving outside the window. I think he could too and he didn't like it."

"That's fine," Shayne said, "at least two of them."

"Yes. After he hit you I heard a noise like somebody calling out some place in the house. I think that's why he was in a hurry and careless when he tied you up. He had to go see. Anyway, he had a knife and he knocked me down. He asked where the money was and hit me. Then he brought me here and tied me. He was going after you, but we heard you on the kitchen floor over us."

"Wonderful," Shayne said. "Just fine."

"All the time I remembered the way you looked when I left the living room. Just a dark column," Cal Harris said, "in front of the fireplace. It looked like the moose head was yours. It made me think of old John."

"Careful with that broken glass," Shayne said. "What about old John?"

"He stood like that times when he didn't know I watched. I think he prayed to that moose."

"Nobody prays to a stuffed moose head," Shayne said. "You must have been mistaken."

"Anyway, I sure caught him talking to it a couple of times. What are we gonig to do now, Mr. Shayne?"

The last cord around the detective's wrists cut through and he began to untie his ankles and then take the wire bonds off Cal Harris.

"Somebody just about broke my head," he said. "The first thing I'm going to do is find him and do a one hundred per cent job on his noggin. You better wait here where you're safe."

"I'm not safe except with you," Harris said. "You know that. Sally said you promised no harm would come to me. Besides, I might be of help."

Shayne thought that over. "I guess you might as well come along. If I leave you here he'd just as likely come back."

They groped around on the floor and found the cane Cal Harris had brought and the other one Shayne

had been holding when he was slugged. For himself the big man took the length of iron pipe that had been used on his head. His gun was gone, of course. Add that to the killer's knife, he thought, but didn't mention it to Harris.

"Did you recognize the killer?" he asked.

"No, I didn't. It was dark and I was half stunned and scared of his knife. Besides, he had a stocking over his head for a mask. His voice was muffled like. I'm pretty sure it wasn't anybody I know, though. Where are we going now, Mr. Shayne?"

"We're going back to the living room," Shayne said. "I think you're right about the hiding place being there. Are you sure it wasn't a woman caught you instead of a man? A woman pretending to be a man, I mean?"

"To tell you the truth I'm not real sure of anything. Like I said, it was all quick and dark and I was scared. I just don't think it was anybody I know, though."

They were both standing on the small landing at the top of the basement stairs. The kitchen door was locked, but that was no problem for Shayne. The killer had taken his gun, but in his haste and in the dark had left the key ring of passkeys and delicate lock-picks which the detective always carried.

Even in the pitch dark he had the door open in less than fifty seconds. After the cellar, the reflected night light through the windows made vision easy in the kitchen.

They didn't have long to look about.

There came a sudden pound of running feet on the second floor above their heads and what sounded like the thud of blows. A voice or voices cried out. Then there was the thud of a heavy fall and feet on the stairs coming down.

Shayne bolted for the door to the hallway, hit a patch of grease on the dirty floor and felt his feet shoot out from under him. He lit all sprawled out and skidded into the side of the heavy old gas range, almost knocking himself out. The sound of running feet was drowned by the roar of jet engines coming in low overhead.

By the time Cal Harris had helped Shayne back onto his feet the house was once again silent.

"What's going on?" Harris asked.

"I'm busy making a damn fool of myself," the redhead said. "Just shut up and let me do it. I'm doing a real fine job so far."

"It ain't your fault," Harris said. "Old John was a dirty old man."

"Come on. Let's go back to the living room. That's where we were headed for. No reason to change our minds now."

They went quietly and cautiously up the hall, not seeing or hearing anything out of the ordinary. The living room door was shut but not locked. Shayne eased it open very quietly.

At first the room seemed to be just as he had left it only a few long minutes before. Then he made out a deeper shadow where no shadow was supposed to be, and a very slight flicker of movement in the darkest part.

He was across the room with the speed and concentrated ferocity of a big jungle cat making its leap to kill. This time nothing tripped him or slowed him down. He was across the big room and had his hands on a wiry figure that twisted and fought under his grip. Fingernails raked his face and feet kicked viciously at his shins.

Then the sheer bulk and hard muscled in-fighting skill of the big man prevailed. The figure under his hands stopped its struggling.

"I've got him," Shayne said. "Hurry up, Cal, and put on one of those lights. Let's see what we got."

"Cal?" said the figure in his grip. "Oh, help, Cal. Help me!"

Cal Harris jumped as if he'd been stabbed.

"Let her go," he yelled, forgetting all about any need for silence. "Mr. Shayne, that's my Sally you have there."

"Oh, hell," Shayne said. "Put on the light. Just one bulb now." He didn't let go of the figure which now felt strangely soft in his grip.

When Harris lit one of the small table lamps they could see that it was indeed Sally Harris in Mike Shayne's grasp. In a man's sport shirt and slacks and a pair of penny-loafers and with a kerchief she could easily have passed for a boy even on the street on a dark night. Shayne let go of her.

"What are you doing here?" he said in a weary tone.

"I told you today I wasn't going to let Cal get hurt," she said. "I followed along to see that no harm come to him and you didn't get him arrested."

"Right now I'd feel better if it was possible to get you both arrested, fast," Shayne said. "Then I could get on with my job. Was that you fighting upstairs just now?"

"It was," Sally said. "Some man jumped me. I think he wanted to kill me. He had a knife. Is he the one you're after?"

"I think likely he is," the redhead said. "That is, unless they just made this place into a motel for escaped lunatics. How did you get away from his knife?"

"I kicked him in the face," Sally said simply. "He didn't like it. Then I run down here."

"So you did," Shayne said. He had a feeling nothing was going to go right for him tonight.

"Was it you prowling around outside earlier, honey?" Cal Harris asked.

"It sure was, lover," she said. "I heard you squawk through the window to the next room. so I come in looking for you. When you wasn't there I went upstairs and called you."

"That was what the killer heard

when he tied you up," Harris said to Shayne.

"Did he tie you up?" Sally asked. "He must be tough."

"Just lucky," Shayne said. "If you don't mind telling a dumb old man, how did you get in here? I thought I had the doors all locked tight?"

"You did. I didn't use a door. One of the windows to the library across the hall was unlocked. I just opened it and came on in. It didn't make a sound, just like it'd been greased to slide easy."

"It probably was," Shayne said. "I guess the killer fixed it that way before he left last night so he'd have an easy way to come back. These are old double-hung windows. He could take the screws out of the lock so it wouldn't hold. I've seen it done before."

"You're a smart man," Sally said.

"Only when I'm not busy being a damn fool," Shayne told her. "Now one more question. Be sure you don't answer unless you know. Was it a man or woman you fought with upstairs?"

"It was a man," Sally said. "I'm absolutely sure. I heard his voice and his hands were rough and square like a man."

"That's fine," Shayne said. "Now I know what this is all about. I wasn't sure before. A couple of things had me puzzled. Now they all fit together. I know who he is and what he did—and why he did it."

"Well, then?" Cal Harris said.

"Well what, boy?"

"Well, why don't we go get him? I mean, if you know who he is and all, hadn't we better grab him and turn him in?"

"There's plenty of time for that," Shayne said. "He won't go far because he hasn't got the money yet that he's after. Even if he did, the police can get out an all points bulletin and catch him like in a net. Once they know who they're after, the cops can always run a man down."

"Let's us do it anyway," Sally Harris said.

"Why us?"

"Because it's us he tried to kill," she said. "Because there might be a reward, and me and Cal need the money."

"You and Cal get part of my reard," Shayne said. "About ten thousand dollars of it, if I'm right."

They both looked at him and gasped.

"You leave that killer to the pros," Shayne said. "You forgot a couple of things. This guy's killed once already. He'd do it again. You can bet on it. He's tough and hard and desperate. And most important of all—"

"What?" Cal Harris interrupted.

"He's got my gun."

"Exactly," said a voice from the doorway. "I have your gun."

IX

THE FIGURE IN the doorway was a slender man in dark, turtleneck

sweater and slacks and rubber-soled shoes. He had a woman's nylon stocking over his head and face for a mask. He also had Mike Shayne's big forty-five Colt's automatic held in his right hand and pointed at the three people standing in front of the fireplace.

"You always keep coming here," he said, "so I guess what I'm after must be in this room. After I get you all tied up, I'll find it."

"Too bad for you you didn't find it last night," Shayne said. "You should have used a bigger gun. Then none of this would have happened."

"What do you mean?" Sally asked.

The masked man waved the gun at them. "Go on and tell her, shamus. I'd like to know how much you really do have figured out. I don't think you're so smart. If you were I wouldn't have you under the gun right now. Would I?"

"Oh, don't worry about that," Shayne said. "I figured more than you think. You've been prowling around here watching this place for a long time to see where John hid his money. Only you never found out. Old man Smith saw you, though, and took a couple of shots at you. That hurried you up. Last night right after dark you climbed the oak tree outside the bedroom upstairs and shot the old man with a twenty-two. That's too small a gun except for a crack shot.

"He was wounded by the ricochet. Then he fooled you. He went and called Mrs. Mullen. While you watched, she came up and fought with him. After that she went away, but you didn't dare break in right then. It was still early and somebody might see.

"You went off to your job for a while. You work alone and nobody knew you got there late. Probably you figured you'd have to try another night. Am I right?"

"Just go on talking, shamus," the masked man said. "I ain't talking. You are."

"Then you came back by here on your way home. What happened? Did you break in again?"

"You know so much I might as well finish it for you," the killer said. "You ain't going to tell nobody anyway. The old fool was hurt and scared. He saw me on the street and called me to come in and help get him to a doctor. I helped okay. I put him out of his misery."

"You beat and stabbed him to death," Shayne said, "but you were still scared of the neighbors. You set that fire so you'd have an excuse to be in the house. You went back out and discovered the fire, didn't you? It gave you your alibi for the killing. Then you figured to come back tonight for the money. You even fixed a window so you could get in. Right?"

"You know too much," the man said. "Now you all know too much." He leveled the gun at Shayne.

"He's going to kill us all," Cal Harris said.

"Oh," Shayne said, "Mr. Smulka

only thinks that's what he's going to do." Under his breath he hissed at them: "Scream."

"What did you say?" Smulka asked. "You're going to die, shamus."

Sally Harris caught on fast. She opened her mouth for a wild, eldritch screech that roused every cat and dog for a mile around. When that girl screamed, she was a champion.

In spite of himself Smulka jumped. Shayne jumped too.

The big man bent his knees and dove for the killer—going in low like a football tackler.

Smulka got off one shot. He was used to a twenty-two, not a forty-five and the heavy recoil of Shayne's souped-up handloads almost broke his wrist. The slug went high and smashed the nose of the hanging moose head. The head fell off the wall.

Shayne's tackle cut Smulka down like an all-American taking out a high school substitute. One big hand got the man's wrist and twisted until the bones cracked and the big gun fell from nerveless fingers. Then Shayne sat up and slugged the killer with an overhand right. Smulka went out like a light.

"My God," Sally Harris said.

She wasn't looking at Smulka on the floor. The wild shot had smashed the nose off the moose head. Tightly wrapped bundles of currency were falling out of the cavity onto the rug where the big head lay. Some were fifties, some hundreds, and some thousand dollar bills. The head must be full of them, the big redhead thought.

Mike Shayne said to Cal Harris, "I guess you were right, boy. I reckon old John Wingren really did pray to the moose."

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AN INCREDIBLE TRUE CRIME THRILLER

by DAVID MAZROFF

THE LAST WOMAN to be executed in the United States for a capital offense was attractive, dark-haired Barbara Graham, who died in the gas chamber in California's San Quentin Prison on June 3, 1955.

She was followed in death by Jack Santo, fifty-four, a thin-lipped, sallow-faced, hard-bitten gunman and hoodlum, and Emmett Perkins, forty-seven, a weasel-featured, heartless thief and all-around bad man.

The three were convicted of the murder of Mrs. Mabel Monohan, a well-to-do, elderly, crippled widow who lived alone in a corner house in a middle-class neighborhood in Burbank, a suburb of Los Angeles, the site of the Warner Brothers Pictures studios where most of the gangster films were made in the heyday of Humphrey Bogart, John Garfield, George Raft, Paul Muni, and Edward G. Robinson.

None of these ever killed in their film roles as viciously as did the perpetrators of the murder of Mrs. Monohan.

The trial of Barbara Graham and her two co-defendants was as bizarre and sensational as was the crime for which they were to pay the extreme penalty. The news media covered it extensively from start to finish, from the moment Mrs. Monohan's brutally battered body was found until Emmett Perkins was pronounced dead.

Who, really, was Barbara Graham? What made her what she had

become, and what events led her to her desperately tragic and ignominious end?

Barbara was born in a slum neighborhood in Oakland, California, in 1923. Her mother was seventeen years old at the time. Her father was as unknown to Barbara as he was to her mother.

Hortense, Barbara's mother, a harried teen-ager, hated the infant she had brought into the world from the first moment she laid eyes on her, according to Barbara's own statement. Hortense felt a shame and disgrace for having brought a bastard into being and the more she regarded the result of her sex experience, now regretted, the more she hated what she saw.

Why she didn't give the infant up for adoption remains an untold puzzle to this day. A short time after Barbara was born, Hortense met and married a man named Joe Wood.

"He was good to me," Barbara said, "and I didn't know he was not my real father until I applied for a birth certificate when I was seventeen.

"When I was two years old my mother dumped me with relatives and disappeared with her husband. She and her husband visited me infrequently over the next several years. He treated me kindly, brought me small giifts, and held me on his lap. My mother couldn't look at me and her whole attitude toward me was one of antagonism. I cried a lot when she came to see me and her relatives because she wouldn't pay any attention to me. I would run to her and hold out my arms to be taken into hers but she pushed me away."

"For crissakes, get the hell away from me, you damned little brat!" Hortense screamed. "Get away! You stink!"

Barbara said she recalled Joe Wood saying, "Why don't you pick her up and hold her? She's your daughter. Pick her up!"

"I hate the little bitch!" Hortense yelled. "If she wants to be held then you hold her!"

Little bitch!

That phrase may have been a forecasting of what Barbara was to become. Perhaps the phrase stuck in the child's mind, an anchor in her subconscious, a drag that stayed her ship of life to the pier of degradation, misery, violence, and murder. For a bitch is what she became.

A murderess? That doubt remains and what happened during the trial for the murder of Mrs. Mabel Monohan gives that doubt a great deal of credence.

The relatives with whom Hortense placed Barbara no longer wanted her around and showed it in many ways. When Hortense next came to visit them they told her to take Barbara wherever she wanted to, but out of their home.

"She's your child, your responsibility. You take care of her!" she was told.

"I'll take care of her all right," Hortense retorted.

She grabbed Barbara by an arm, dragged her into the little room where the child slept and packed her meager belongings in a shopping bag. She placed Barbara with a woman named Mrs. Lottie Kennedy, a fat harridan with a cruel streak in her makeup.

Mrs. Kennedy owned a parrot that kept up a steady stream of parrot sounds in its attempt to utter the words Mrs. Kennedy tried to teach the bird to say. Barbara believed the bird wanted to get out of its cage or it wouldn't protest so loudly and incessantly. She opened the cage and the parrot flew out, landed on a sideboard and knocked over a slim crystal vase which smashed into bits.

Mrs. Kennedy came running into the dining room, stared at the wreckage and the yawking bird and screamed hotly at Barbara.

"You damned little brat! I'll fix you! I'll fix you good!"

Mrs. Kennedy yanked her into a corner and told her to stay there, facing the wall. She then went into the kitchen, peeled a large onion, cut it in half and returned to the child, who now was whimpering with fear. Mrs. Kennedy forced the onion halves into Barbara's hands.

"Hold these to your eyes until I tell you to take them away. If you take them away before that I'll whip you silly. You got that?" As a sample of the whipping she threatened she whacked the child several times across the shoulders with her fist.

Each day turned into a new kind of horror for Barbara as Mrs. Kennedy sought novel kinds of punishment for house infractions, real and imagined. Finally, after almost a year, Joe Wood came to see Barbara, took one look at her and wanted to know what Mrs. Kennedy had done to her.

"She looks terrible," Joe Wood said. "What in hell have you been doing to her?"

"I've been trying to teach her some manners, that's what I've been doing to her!"

"How? By beating her and starving her?"

"Who says I beat her? She eats what I do. I can't help it if it don't show."

"I know what does show. Brutality, that's what shows. I'm taking her out of here before you kill her with your kindness!"

"Take her and good riddance. That damned brat tried to poison me one day. She put roach powder in my soup!"

Barbara denied it. She did tell Joe Wood that Mrs. Kennedy made her wash the dishes, sweep the floors, mop them, and do other chores on the promise that if she did them well she would allow her to go out and play.

"She never let me out of the house," Barbara told Wood. "When I finished doing what she wanted she told me it wasn't done good

and to do it over, and then because I had to do it over she said I had to be punished and so couldn't go out and play. She beat me too."

"I ought to kill her," Joe Wood said.

"That's right, Daddy. You ought to kill her."

It was the first time that Barbara had ever heard the word "kill" in reference to a human being, and it may also have been true that she did put roach powder into Mrs. Kennedy's soup. If that is so then she indicated at that tender age that she had in her makeup a leaning toward planned violence.

JOE WOOD took Barbara home, and *home* was a shack. Hortense, a half-brother and half-sister by Joe Wood lived there with their crippled grandfather, a kindly old gentleman who never understood his daughter and feared her temper. It was during the depression and there was little food in the house. The children were always hungry and cried a great deal. Hortense yelled and swore at them and nothing grandpa could say or do would shut her up. When Barbara was seven, Joe Wood died suddenly. Things really got worse then.

Hortense, still young and attractive, went out every night with different men. She forced Barbara to clean the shack, do all the chores she did while she was living with Mrs. Kennedy. One day she ran away, was found on a street and returned home. She ran away again, and again was brought back home.

Hortense yanked her out of the shack and took her to an orphanage, St. Mary's of the Palms in San Jose. The sisters were kind and treated her with a great deal of sympathy and understanding. The few months she spent in the orphanage were the only happy memories she had of her childhood.

For some unexplained reason, Hortense took her out of the orphanage and placed Barbara in the Home of the Good Shepherd, a school for incorrigible girls. Barbara stayed there until she was caught sneaking over the wall that kept the girls fenced in. She had wanted to pinch some oranges in a nearby grove.

Instead of reprimanding her in a way a child should have been, they kicked her out of the home, a home that was supposed to straighten kids out who ran away from home.

Back in the shack with grandpa she found a measure of happiness in his kindness and in her school work. Like another young woman whose life ended in violence, Bonnie Parker, Barbara had a leaning for poetry and English literature. She read Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman, Robert Burns, Shakespeare, and Robert Bridges. She was fourteen and like most girls that age began to take an interest in boys. She was well developed and mature for her age.

Hortense's mother instinct or a

sudden desire to inflict her brand of discipline came to the fore and she refused to allow Barbara to date during all the time she was in high school. No dances, football games, or any other activity.

Fed up with Hortense's strict discipline, Barbara ran away. She went to San Francisco, where she met a man in his mid-thirties in a bar where she was trying to get a job as a waitress. He made a big pitch for her until he found out she was jail bait.

"Come on," he said, "I'll take you home to mother."

Barbara was certain there was no mother and that she would wind up having her first sex experience. She was broke and hungry and decided that if this was the way it had to be then there was no use fighting it.

To her surprise, there was a mother. The man was an ex-con with a heart. They were good to her, mother and son. But it didn't last long. Hortense tracked her down with the help of the juvenile authorities. However, she rebelled. She stayed home but she also sneaked out regularly for dates with boys.

The boys made the usual advances and for a while she resisted going all the way. One boy, however, far more mature than the others, a senior in high school with money to spend, bought her gifts because he realized she came from a very poor family and had little or nothing of the things young girls desire and value. He bought her stockings, handkerchiefs, gloves, bits of costume jewelry, and all the time he treated her with the greatest respect, made no advances.

The psychology worked for him. On this night, parked in his car on a hill overlooking the city, he took her in his arms and kissed her tenderly, stroked her hair and told her how lovely she was. His tenderness and carresses thrilled her. Here was someone who liked her, loved her even, wanted her. She gave no resistance to anything he did, and he had his way with her.

It was the beginning. He saw her almost every night for several months. The word spread. Buy her presents and she'll put out. She soon became one of the most popular girls in the neighborhood. Hortense learned of her escapades and had her committed to the Ventura

School for Girls, a state reform school.

The matrons had checked her mother's background and believed that the daughter was no better or worse and took pains to tell her so. She was told that her mother, according to the records, had spent two years in the school as a delinquent. It had happened when Barbara was two years old. Barbara spent two years in the school and was paroled. The conditions of her parole was that she work at a job and stay home nights. She got a job as a domestic at a paltry wage.

The work was hard. She stuck to it for the eight months of her parole and was discharged from custody. As soon as she received her discharge papers she left town and went to San Diego. This was early in 1940. She worked at various jobs, had a few dates, and then met a mechanic named Harry Kielhammer in a small-time bar.

It was the kind of bar girls and women frequent for the sole purpose of meeting men, and the men feel that any girl who walks into that bar is ready to say "yes" to the big question. Harry Kielhammer, dull, humorless, ordinary, had never hoped to find an attractive young girl like Barbara who would be willing to go along with him. He asked her to marry him and she said she would.

It was an escape from Hortense's authority. Their marriage was hectic because of Barbara's frequent excursions to bars and her staying out until the wee hours of the morning after which she refused to explain her whereabouts or actions. She bore Kielhammer two sons, Billy and Darryl.

Soon after, Kielhammer got a divorce. He didn't want the boys and Barbara couldn't afford to keep them. They were sent to Kielhammer's mother in Seattle.

Barbara then began cruising up and down the West Coast, trying to find some place where she would fit, someone who would *want* her! There was an assortment of men but none of them sought a permanent alliance with her. She wound up back in San Diego. The town was full of sailors eager to spend months of pay on any attractive girl who was *willing*. She was willing.

She became a "sea-gull"—a gal who follows the fleet. She finally married a sailor named Aloyce Pueschel, just before he shipped out. After Pueschel shipped out she roved from Seattle to Reno; from San Francisco to Los Angeles to Bakersfield, Stockton, and other towns on the Coast. Once she got as far as Chicago, where she obtained jobs as a waitress and a dice girl.

In a bar on North Clark Street and North Avenue she met two "pals" — Mark Monroe and Tom Sittler, a couple of journeymen thieves, robbers, and small-time gunmen. They went for her because she talked like a girl who had been around and knew the score.

"How are you fixed for money, baby?" Monroe asked her.

"Is a girl always fixed for money? There's never enough, and I'm not giving you a sob story."

"I'm sure you're not." He turned to his friend. "Tom, you think she's giving us a sob story?"

"Nope. She looks like a right-o to me. Let's do something for her. Here, I'll chip in a double sawbuck."

"Don't be cheap. Make it half a yard and I'll match it."

Tom Sittler handed Monroe fifty dollars and Monroe added his fifty to it and gave it to Barbara.

"You guys were sent from heaven," Barbara exclaimed. "This will take care of a lot of my troubles."

"Any time," Monroe added. "What time do you get off?"

"A little after two. This joint only has a two o'clock ticket. I generally have a bite to eat and then I go home."

"You tied up with anyone?" Monroe asked.

"Free as a bird."

"Good. We'll meet you back here at two. See you."

They paid her rent, gave her money for clothes, the whole bit. And then on this night they made her a proposition and she went for it.

Monroe said, "We're convinced you're a real solid gal, Babs, so we're going to ask you to help us. We'll make it worth your while. We need your help bad so we can stay out of the can."

"Sure, Mark. If I can help I'll be glad to."

This was one of Barbara's weaknesses, agreeing to do something before she weighed the consequences, the danger to herself, the price she would have to pay. It wasn't that she was gullible nor lacking in intelligence. She was weak in that singular area of giving of herself in order to win someone's favor, especially if she was wanted or needed.

Mark Monroe said, "We're wanted in San Francisco. We're out on bail now for having beaten up and ribbed Sally Stanford, the vice queen out there. You hear of her?"

"No, I don't think so. Maybe. What do I have to do?"

"We want you to be our alibi, say that you were with us on the day it happened. That's all."

"That's all? Sure, I'll be glad to do it. Just tell me what to say and I'll fix it."

"We've got it fixed up with a pal of ours in Frisco. He owns a small hotel. You say you were with us all day at the hotel until midnight. Stick to that story and we can beat the rap."

"Okay. I'll stick to it. You can bet on it."

"Good girl. We'll give you five bills for your trouble and pay all your expenses. Here's half of it now." He handed her two hundred and fifty dollars.

It was a big mistake for her. The cops in Frisco were a lot smarter

than she gave them credit for being. They checked her out thoroughly, juvenile record, home record, marriages, and the fact that she was in Chicago on the day she testified that she was in Frisco. The district attorney ripped her to the bone when he took over the cross-examination. She was charged with perjury, sentenced to eight months in jail and placed on five years' probation.

PROBATION WAS A millstone around her neck. She had to have a legitimate job, stay in town, and report to her probation officer every week. She had divorced Aloyce Pueschel, so was free to marry again. She felt that if she married a man who traveled she would be able to leave town on the excuse that she wanted to travel with her husband in order to be near him.

The man she chose was a traveling salesman named Charles Newman. Shortly after their marriage she divorced him and was free to do her thing, go where she wanted. And now she met John Brick, a big, good-looking guy, smooth as silk who carried a lot of money although he worked as a chauffeur for the very rich Dr. Malcolm Hoffman.

Brick put her up in a cozy apartment and they lived in style. It was too good to be true, as most things so far in her life turned out to be. Some time later, Dr. Hoffman was arrested and charged with performing illegal operations. John Brick was arrested with him and charged as an accomplice in procuring clients for Hoffman's abortions.

Barbara knew that she wouldn't have a chance in court if she were picked up in Brick's apartment, not with her record and that five years hanging over her head for violation of probation.

She lammed. Her whole life style was leading her to the inevitable and final experience that would deliver her to the state's executioner.

Instead of leaving the state, as she should have, she chose to go to Los Angeles instead. It is often this one choice, the single decision. the step taken without calculation that leads one to total disaster or to fame and fortune. The latter was not in the cards for Barbara Graham. Sheer circumstance formed the events that brought her into contact with Emmett Perkins and Jack Santo. First, however, she met the last of her four husbands, Hank Graham, a gentle little guy with a quick smile and an engaging grin which bespoke a sense of humor. It was the most unforgettable milestone along the path that led her to a cell in death row in San Quentin Prison.

It was now the summer of 1950. Barbara was in a restaurant on Broadway, a spot where a lot of sharpies hung out — horse players, small-time bookies, short-con artists looking to make a fast buck. Someone introduced her to Hank Graham. There was nothing about Hank Graham that should have evoked a spark

of romance in Barbara unless it was that infectious grin. For the first time in her life she found someone she could truly love.

She said later, "Here at last, I figured, was my chance to go really legitimate and settle down to a sane life. For a time there was nothing or no one that interested me except Hank. We were in a hurry to get married. When we did I was happier than I had ever been in my life, and I thought back to my days at St. Mary's orphanage when I was five years old. It was wonderful. I thought of trying to get Billy and Darryl, my two little boys, back from Seattle where they were living with Min Kielhammer, their father's mother.

"I learned quickly that this would be impossible because my beloved mother had informed Mrs. Kielhammer that I had served a year in the penitentiary on a perjury rap. She couldn't even tell the truth about me on that. Actually it was only eight months, and in a jail, not a penitentiary.

"Things went along well for Hank and me and then I made a terrible discovery. Hank, my little guy with that lovable grin, was a junkie!

"The junk, the Big H, heroin, began to interfere with Hank's work. He never had enough money left from his pay to take care of the rent, food bills, or other household expenses. We had some violent arguments. I'd get all puffed up and walk out on him. And where would I go? To the spots where the sharp guys hung out, the boys from the so-called underworld."

One night, after an argument with Hank, Barbara walked out and went to the restaurant where she first met him. She was introduced by a bookie friend to a dapper, sporty little guy with sunken features. He was Emmett Perkins.

Perkins and his partner, Jack Santo, had been involved in at least a half-dozen murders, including the Chester, California massacre of Gard Young and three small children.

Perkins bought her a cup of coffee and they sat at a corner table and talked in low tones.

"I've got an undercover gambling set-up out in El Monte, in a private house. If you'll work as a come-on girl for the house you'll get a nice cut of the action. You interested?"

"I sure am. When do I start?"

Once again she made a decision on the spur of the moment without weighing the potential consequences. She already had a criminal record. An arrest for violation of the state's gambling laws would send her back to a prison cell, and because she had a record it would be for the maximum penalty provided by law. Had she weighed this possibility, weighed the potential punishment, the deprivation of her liberty, life in a prison cell, for what she might earn in hard cash, she would have turned it down, said good-by to Perkins and walked out of his life forever.

She didn't tell her husband of her new job. The first night she went out, all dolled up in her best finery, she said that she was going to a movie. Instead she went to a bar, sat down and ordered a drink.

A girl alone in a bar means only one thing to a man on the make. The men were not long in approaching. The first one looked like ready money. He was obviously married and so couldn't put up a beef.

"Can I buy you a drink, honey?"

Barbara gave him a small smile. "Okay, if you like. My name is Babs. What's yours?"

"Uh, John. That's it. John." He was a John all right.

After several drinks he popped the twenty-dollar question. Barbara gave him a big smile which told him she was willing, but—

"I know a nice little place where we can have some excitement first. It's a private gambling place. Could we go there first?"

They could and did. John lost his roll and Barbara lost her interest. She walked out on him while Emmett Perkins delayed him with a talk on how he just didn't have the dice breaking right for him. Tomorrow would be another day.

That's the way it went several nights a week. The money she earned went for rent and food, and some of it to keep Hank going with his habit. Things went along this way until Barbara gave birth to Tommy early in March 1953. About this time she and Hank had a knockdown, drag-out fight over her nights out and his jealousy over "Uncle" Emmett, to whom he was introduced as the benefactor who supplied the money for the upkeep of the household expenses.

"What I earn also pays for your damned habit!" Barbara yelled at Hank. "What the hell have you got to be jealous about? I'm not sleeping with Emmett, never have and never will. He's a means toward an end, that's all!"

"Yeah, he sure is! If you're not careful he'll take you to your end!"

They were prophetic words but Hank didn't know it at the time. He spoke from anger rather than from suspicion or knowledge of the kind of man Emmett Perkins truly was.

"Okay. But I've had it. I'm leaving!"

"Good! That's the best thing

you've said since I first met you. And the sooner the better."

"Right now soon enough?"

"Perfect. Good-by, Hank!"

For the next few days Barbara tried to get in touch with Emmett Perkins but was unsuccessful. She was broke and needed money for food. In desperation, she issued a bum check at a super market. She tried again to get in touch with Perkins and again was unsuccessful, and again she issued a bad check. Things were getting hot for her. She still had the old probation rap hanging over her head and the bad check charge would throw her into prison for a long sentence.

She bundled up Tommy and took him to Mrs. Anna Webb, Hank's mother. She then packed her clothes and checked into a motel under an assumed name, after which she went looking for Emmett Perkins again. This time she found him. With him was Jack Santo, a big, hulking guy whose morals came from a jungle and his character from the teeth of a tiger.

"I'm hot," Barbara told them. "I've put out a couple of bum checks and unless I make them good the cops will throw me in jail for a long time."

"How much?" Santo asked.

"Thirty dollars. I've got to make them good today or else."

Santo handed her the thirty dollars. "Here, go pick up the checks and come back here. We've got a proposition that will put you on easy street."

Barbara snatched the money from Santo's hand and dashed out the door toward the super market to pick up the checks she had issued.

THE BODY OF Mrs. Mabel Monohan was discovered on March 11, two days after her murder, by Mrs. Monohan's gardener, who had noticed the floodlights burning and the front door to the house ajar. He went into the house and what he saw turned his stomach. Only one other victim of gangland's force had ever died as brutally. She was Estelle Carey, an attractive young woman, the girl friend of Nick Circella, a Capone hood.

The Parkside Avenue home of Mrs. Monohan was dark and quiet on this night of March 9, 1953. Mrs. Monohan was alone in the house. She felt secure. There was a high stone wall around the back yard. Floodlights illuminated both the front and back yards. There was a double bolt and chain on the front door. All the windows were fixed firmly with special locking devices. Her daughter, Iris, divorced from Los Angeles and Las Vegas gambling kingpin Tudor Scherer, fearing for her mother's safety because the elderly woman lived alone, had seen to it that every device for her safety was provided.

The only thing she had omitted was a caution that her mother never admit a stranger into the house

on any pretext. Mrs. Monohan, a kindly person, brought on her violent death because of her faith in human nature.

The facts of the murder, as testified to by several principals and near-principals in the crime, were that on the night of March 9, 1953, a brunette young woman rang the bell of Mrs. Monohan's home. Mrs. Monohan was reading a mystery story—"The Purple Pony Murder" —and when the bell range she rose from her chair and hobbled to the front door and cautiously opened the peephole, turned on the front porch light and peered through.

"Yes, what is it?" she asked of the young woman at the door.

"My car is broken down in the middle of the intersection and I am unable to get it started. I was wondering if you would be kind enough to let me use your telephone to call a garage?" There was distress in the young woman's voice.

"All right, dear," Mrs. Monohan answered, eager to help a young woman in trouble. She unbolted the door.

As the door swung open the young woman and several men overwhelmed her. The young woman smashed the heavy butt of a pistol against the frail woman's head. It was a vicious blow and Mrs. Monohan reeled backward and let out a high moan.

"My God!" she moaned. "My God! Don't kill me. Please don't kill me!"

Several more blows rained on her head and she slumped to the floor unconscious. The young woman found a pillow case and drew it over the fallen victim's head. One of the men pulled the woman's hands behind her back and tied them together. It was a useless and senseless gesture because Mrs. Monohan was unconscious and would have remained so for hours.

They weren't satisfied, however. Another of the men drew a garrot-like noose around her neck and shoved her with his foot. The gang then began a systemtic search of the house, their search centered on a floor safe they believed was somewhere in the home. They found none.

The men and lone woman swore in frustration, made another frantic search of the premises and then left. Why the murder?

Tudor Scherer had lived in Mrs. Monohan's home when he was married to Iris.

Later, when Iris divorced him, he continued to visit Mrs. Monohan frequently. On these occasions he was seen carrying a small black bag into the Parkside house. It was assumed that the bag contained huge amounts of cash from Scherer's Las Vegas gambling casinos.

The house was cased by several small-time hoods, none of whom had enough intelligence to come in out of the rain. Among these were Solly Davis, a former Mickey Cohen mobster; Baxter Shorter; Indian

George, and William Upshaw. Baxter Shorter contacted Jack Santo and told him of what he had seen.

"You know Scherer, Jack. The guy is loaded. He skims a lot of dough off the top from his gambling joint in Vegas and it's my guess that the dough is in that house, in a safe. There's one old lady living there now—Scherer's mother-in-law. It should be a pushover. All you need to do is get a box-man to crack the safe."

"How sure are you that Scherer is carrying money into the house in that bag? It could be a few changes of underwear and socks."

"No, no. He stays in the house about an hour and comes out."

"With the bag?"

"Yeah, with the bag. And it is empty. I could tell from the way he was holding it."

"Okay. I'll look into it. Have you told anyone else about this? Anyone else know about it?"

"Not that I know of. I haven't talked to anyone else about it. If anyone else has cased the play I haven't heard of it."

Shorter lied. He had mentioned it to Indian George and George talked to Solly Davis and William Upshaw about it. That tied all four together as conspirators if not principals in the crime.

Lieutenant Robert Coveney, a smart, tough, honest and vigilant cop, in charge of the investigation of the murder, combed the underworld for some word or clue that would lead him to the killers. He determined to put the human wolf pack who had committed the murder into the gas chamber. He had viewed the chilling sight of the dead woman, the blood-smeared face beaten almost beyond recognition and the memory of it burned his insides.

Indian George read the papers on the story of the murder, the quoted statements of Lieutenant Coveney that teams of detectives were on the case and that they wouldn't rest until the killers were nabbed, tried, and paid the full penalty for the crime. Indian George was scared. He could be involved. He could go to prison for life, or he might wind up in the gas chamber.

On March 15, one week after the murder, Lieutenant Coveney got the first break of the case. He received a call from Indian George.

"Who were the men that talked to you about robbing the home of Mrs. Monohan?" Lieutenant Coveney asked. His insides were churning with excitement.

"I had nothing to do with this caper, lieutenant," George said. "You're not going to hold me, are you?"

"Not if you had nothing to do with it. Who were the men?"

"Well, Baxter Shorter told me about it and I talked to Solly Davis and William Upshaw about it. I don't know if they were in on it or not. Honest."

"Okay. I'll check it out. Baxter Shorter, Solly Davis, and William Upshaw. Anything else you want to tell me? Any little detail you may have overlooked or let slip your memory?"

Indian George hesitated and Lieutenant Coveney noted it. He prompted George again.

"Come on, let's have it. You've gone this far so you may as well go all the way, if you want to stay in the clear."

Indian George hesitated again for a moment, then said, "After the murder Shorter told me that if I breathed one word to anyone about casing the house—"

"Mrs. Monohan's house?"

"Yes, sir. He said that if I told anyone about it that he would kill me."

"All right. Anything else? Don't leave out anything. I want the whole story, every bit of conversation you may have had with Shorter, Davis or Upshaw."

"That's it, lieutenant. Honest. That's all of it."

"Okay. You can go. But stick around where I can find you if I should want to talk to you again"

"Yer, sir. Thanks, lieutenant."

LIEUTENANT COVENEY put out an APB on Shorter, Davis and Upshaw. The three men were picked up and given a thorough grilling. None of the trio would admit knowing anything about the murder. The three men also refused to take lie detector tests. Lieutenant Coveney held them as long as the law allowed and then had to release them. Before he did so he told Baxter Shorter he was walking on thin ice.

"I'm positive you're involved in this up to your neck. When I prove it you'll wish you were never born. This is probably the most vicious killing I've ever had to work on. It turns my stomach. So do you. You're a quaking, squirming piece of scum right now and I know it. There's going to be a tail on your can around the clock just in case. Get out of here. Looking at you makes me want to vomit!"

Mrs. Iris Sowder, Mrs. Monohan's daughter and Tudor Scherer's ex-wife, now offered a reward of $5,000 for the apprehension and conviction of her mother's slayers. Indian George read of it and called Lieutenant Coveney again.

"I thought of something I forgot

to tell you, lieutenant. When Shorter talked to me he mentioned a guy named Jack. Just that, Jack. He said the guy was big and tough and would probably do the job. If you break the case on my information, will I get the reward?"

"We'll see," Coveney answered and hung up.

The code of the underworld, he thought, and couldn't stop the involuntary sneer that came to his lips. He turned to one of his men. "Put out an APB on those three lice we had on the Monohan case. We're going to give them another going over. I want them in separate cells and I want their cells bugged. Let's move!"

Shorter, Davis, and Upshaw were picked up and tossed into three separate but adjoining cells. Shorter began to worry. Why hadn't they been questioned? What had the cops found out? Worst of all, he had talked too much to Upshaw and he was afraid that Upshaw would crack and spill his guts. He was right.

Upshaw yelled over to him to come up to the bars of his cell. Shorter did. The two men talked in low tones but every word they said was picked up by the monitor who was listening in. There was excitement in the squad room. A break in the case was coming.

Upshaw suggested to Shorter that they make a deal with District Attorney S. Ernest Roll. "It's our only out. Either we turn state's evidence or we're liable to wind up in the gas chamber."

"Yeah, but I want our lawyer there when we talk to the DA. I'll tell Coveney we want Tom Mercola present or we make no statements."

"Good, good. That's the best way."

On the evening of March 30, in a sort of cloak and dagger setup, a meeting was held in the Miramar Hotel in Santa Monica. Present were Lieutenant Coveney representing Burbank, Chief of Police Rex Andrews, District Attorney Roll, Assistant D.A. Adolph Alexander, and Tom Mercola, attorney for the three men.

Baxter Shorter made a complete statement, Jack Santo, Emmett Perkins, Barbara Graham. He gave their descriptions and the full text of conversations he had had with Jack Santo.

"I met Santo and Perkins in a motel in El Monte on March 7. We looked Mrs. Monohan's home over the next day, and again on the 9th. We decided to take it that night. We met in a restaurant in Burbank that evening and drove to Parkside Avenue. That's it."

"Who is John True?" Lieutenant Coveney asked.

"He's a box man, a safe cracker. He was supposed to open the safe, if there was one."

Up to this point Shorter had not mentioned that Barbara Graham accompanied the men to the Monohan home, and his questioners failed to

ask him about it, assuming that she had accompanied them. This was the big flaw in the case so far as Barbara Graham was concerned.

John True was picked up and interrogated by District Attorney Roll in presence of two assistants and Coveney. Roll needed True's testimony to make a case. The law of corroboration.

"If your testimony is corroborative I will recommend absolute immunity. I'm offering you this because you have no previous criminal record."

True agreed to testify if he were called on to do so. And now the police made a bad mistake. They booked True on a charge of murder, though he had made no statement other than that he would be willing to testify if called upon. True's attorney got a writ of habeas corpus and Burbank Chief of Police Rex Andrews was forced to release him. The story broke in the papers.

Coveney was certain that Jack Santo and Emmett Perkins would know that someone had talked or John True would not have been picked up, and that someone had to be Baxter Shorter. He ordered protection for Shorter.

He was absolutely right in his assumption. Santo and Perkins tabbed Shorter as the stool pigeon. Their belief was confirmed when the April 14 editions published a resume of Shorter's confession. It was bye, bye birdie for Shorter.

Shorter and his wife Olivia lived in an apartment house on North Flower Street, in the shadow of the city hall. They were at home watching television before having dinner. Shortly after eight o'clock there was a knock on the door. Shorter answered it. When he opened the door he stared into the barrel of a .38 pistol held by Emmett Perkins. Mrs. Shorter saw Perkins, the gun in his hand, and screamed.

"Get back or I'll kill you too!" Perkins threatened. He aimed the gun at Mrs. Shorter and Baxter yelled at his wife to get back into the house. She ran back toward the living room and called the police.

She screamed hysterically. "Come quick! They're going to kill my husband! Hurry!"

Police arrived minutes later but they were too late. Mrs. Shorter could give them no description of the car used to take her husband away. She did know Perkins and identified his photo in the rogues' gallery. She told Lieutenant Coveney what her husband had revealed to her about the Monohan murder.

"He cried like a baby when he told me how they had beaten her and killed her. He didn't think they would hurt her, just force her to tell them where the money was hidden."

Coveney was depressed. Their case seemed to have flown out the window. Their star witness was gone, and very likely dead at this moment, there was nothing to present in court. William Upshaw's statement covered only the conspir-

acy aspect. John True had said nothing and probably never would. Solly Davis had said nothing, and would adhere to the code. Coveney and the Los Angeles cops, who had been brought into the case because of Shorter's kidnaping, fanned the underworld informers for word of the whereabouts of Jack Santo and Emmett Perkins. They also wanted Barbara Graham. The mug shots of the three were in every police station in the city and an APB was out on them.

Days of fruitless searching and talking to countless stoolies brought nothing but sore feet and severe headaches. And then the cops got a break, the big break in the case.

Barbara craved for a fix. The tensions of her life had forced her to find some form of alleviation and she had turned to heroin, the very worst thing she could have done at this stage of the game.

"I'm going into town," she said to Santo. "I want to get something."

"We're hotter than hell, Babs," Santo replied. "Every cop in town is carrying our mug shots. You're taking an awful chance of getting busted. Or you may be followed and lead the fuzz right to our door."

"I'll be careful, Jack. Don't worry about it. I know what to do."

"I hope so."

Barbara contacted a user and pusher, an old man dying of cancer. He needed money for his habit and to live on. When he saw Barbara he knew he had it. It was right there

in his pocket, that $5,000 reward.

"I haven't got any stuff on me," he said. "You go to the depot in Huntington Park. A woman will meet you there and give you all you want. How much do you want?"

She named the amount.

"Okay. She'll have it, but the price went up. The town is hot and all the fuzz is busting everybody in town. Yeah, the town is really steaming."

"Yes, I know. I'll be at the depot in an hour. I don't want to wait around so be sure the contact is there."

The old man hustled to a phone as soon as Barbara was out of sight and called Detective Chief Thad Brown.

"Yeah, it's her!" he said excitedly. "I know her! Don't forget me on the reward. It's my reward!"

The full force of the police de-

partment went into immediate action. Plainclothes detectives, some on foot, some in unmarked cars, policewomen, the whole bit. That's the big advantage the law has on the lawbreaker—unlimited resources of men, equipment, cooperation of citizens, and many denizens of the underworld who seek protective favor in exchange for information. And so the trap was set and ready to be sprung. The last days of Barbara Graham's freedom and life began.

Barbara made her buy in the ladies' room of the depot. The woman who handed over the packets of heroin was a policewoman. She went into a compartment, closed the door, and fixed a pop, pumped it into her arm. She came out and headed for the door leading to a bus stand, got into the bus and sat down. Another policewoman also boarded the bus. Detectives in several cars followed.

Barbara got off the bus almost at the door of the hideout in Lynwood. It was a plain one-story building that had been converted from a store into an apartment and the door leading to it was flush with the sidewalk. A half-dozen teams of detectives headed by Brown, Homicide Captain Bob Lohrman, and Intelligence Captain James Hamilton covered every side of the building, front, sides, and back. Brown gave a signal and a burly detective kicked the door in and about a dozen cops rushed into the room.

Barbara let out a scream. She was standing in the middle of the room, completely naked. Jack Santo grabbed a pair of shorts and drew them on. Emmett Perkins stood against a wall of the room and glared first at Barbara and then at the cops. He saw the whole picture. Barbara had led the cops right to their door. He had told Jack they shouldn't allow her to leave the apartment but Santo had minimized it.

"But you warned her about how hot we were," Perkins said after Barbara had left.

"I know. She's a smart girl, knows how to handle herself!"

"Like hell! No broad does. And this one is on the stuff!"

"You worry too much, Perk. Drop it."

NEWSPAPER REPORTERS flooded the hall of justice when the three were brought in. Santo and Perkins stared straight ahead as they walked but Barbara bent her head and refused to look up as news photographers snapped pictures. The trio was booked and charged with suspicion of robbery, murder, and kidnaping. Barbara also was charged with the offense of passing worthless checks. She had failed to pick up the checks from the super market with the $30 given her to do so.

The grand jury voted murder indictments against Jack Santo, Emmett Perkins, Barbara Graham, and John True. The district attorney knew he still didn't have a case he

could take to court despite the indictments. He needed direct testimony from an eye witness to the crime. It was hopeless to think that either Santo or Perkins would turn state's evidence. And equally hopeless to believe that Barbara Graham would sing. She had no voice for it. That left them John True.

"He's our only chance," the D.A. said. "We know he's out in Sausilito."

"We'll go get him," Lieutenant Coveney said. "With enough pressure he just might talk."

The D.A. put though a call to Inspector Frank Ahearn of the San Francisco Police Department and asked him to arrest True on a charge of murder. Lieutenant Coveney and Robert LaVold of the Los Angeles Police Department flew to San Francisco. They put the heat on True. They grilled him for three days and finally True indicated that he wanted to get off the hook. Free. Clean. No charges of any kind.

"You guarantee me full immunity for turning state's evidence and I'll testify. Otherwise, no deal. I'll take my chances in court. Santo and Perkins won't tell you the right time, and I don't think Barbara will either. So what have you got? Also. I want a bodyguard, highest cop you can give me. No rookie. I know Santo."

"Let me call the D.A. and we'll give you an answer," Coveney said. "I'll be right back."

Coveney got in touch immediately with District Attorney Ernest Roll and related the terms on which True would agree to testify.

"Okay," Roll agreed. "We've got no case without him. Tell him I said we'll go along."

"No good. He wants to hear from you personally."

"Put him on."

Lieutenant Coveney put True on the phone and Roll assured him that he would be given full immunity from prosecution and a bodyguard.

"Good enough. You've got a deal," True replied.

Several hours later, Chief Assistant District Attorney Adolph Alexander arrived from Los Angeles and took over the questioning. John True sang like a hungry canary. He related every incident of the planning and murder of Mrs. Monohan. After his statement had been recorded, Alexander and Coveney knew they had the case in the bag. True's story exactly matched that given by Baxter Shorter and checked out with the statement made by Upshaw. Alexander and Coveney were jubilant.

"We've got an airtight case," Alexander said. He let out a heavy sigh. "Phew! I never believed we'd solve this one, not with those three cookies. Hard as nails!"

The trial of Perkins, Santo and Barbara Graham got under way late in August. Adolph Alexander and J. Miller Leavy teamed for the prosecution. Judge Charles W. Fricke appointed Jack Hardy, an able at-

torney, to defend Barbara, and Ward Sullivan to defend Santo and Perkins. John True, the accomplice turned witness, was assigned a deputy public defender.

The intensely dramatic trial began with a packed courtroom, with some score of police officers spread throughout the audience, and it was an audience, one that had come to witness a trial that proved to be more sensational than anything like it presented on stage or screen.

Attorney Jack Hardy protested to the court. "I deem this display a highly irregular procedure. It is an obvious intimidation of the defendants and the jury."

"Considering the elements of this case, and the character of the defendants I dare say we could not hold this trial in Grauman's Chinese Theatre," Judge Fricke replied.

There was an outburst of laughter from the crowd and Judge Fricke rapped his gavel for order. "I want to warn you people that this is a court of law in which three defendants are on trial for their lives. I am mindful of the gravity of the trial despite my last statement and if there are any other outbursts I shall clear the courtroom."

Attorney Hardy protested Judge Fricke's reply to him. "I consider the Court's response highly prejudicial and I want the record to show my objection."

"So be it," Judge Fricke replied.

While Barbara was in the county jail she struck up a strong friendship with a girl named Donna Prow, a good-looking young brunette who was serving a year on a charge of manslaughter. Barbara was a bisexual girl with strong sexual needs. When she couldn't get a man she was able to do a switch and find satisfaction with a woman. She wanted cute Donna Prow and was willing to do anything to get her. Donna saw in this friendship a chance to relieve herself of a prison sentence and return to the free world. She led Barbara on.

At one point in their conversation Barbara said that she needed an alibi for the night of March 9, the night of the murder. "Unless I have an alibi I'm going to wind up in the gas chamber."

Barbara had forgotten her experience with Mark Monroe and Tom Sittler when she was convicted of perjury for her attempt to establish an alibi for the two men. However, she was desperate at this itme, facing the greatest crisis of her life and, like a drowning man, she was grasping at any straw that floated by.

Donna said, "I have a friend of mine coming to visit me in a day or so. I'm sure he'll be willing to help you. I'll talk to him."

"Gee, honey, I'll really appreciate it. If I get off I'll see to it that you are handsomely taken care of."

"Sure, Babs. Anything for a friend."

Donna Prow was no one's friend. She was strictly out for herself. She was acquainted with Lieutenant Co-

veney and sent word to him that she had something important she was sure he'd be interested in. Coveney came immediately. Donna told him of her conversation with Barbara. Lieutenant Coveney nodded.

"I'll take care of this. Thanks, Donna."

"What about me, lieutenant? Will you try to get my time cut if this works out? I want to get out of here!"

"I'll do whatever I can, Donna. I'm sure I can arrange it with the D.A. and the judge."

Coveney arranged to have an undercover agent pose as Donna's boyfriend. The man he sent was Samuel Sirianni, a handsome, dark-haired young police officer.

Sirianni visited Barbara at the county jail. He had a small miniphone strapped to his chest and under his coat so that it was invisible to Barbara.

"What can I do for you?" Sirianni asked. "I'm told you need help. I'm here to help you because you're a friend of Donna's."

Barbara was taken by the handsome young man before her and thought of how nice it would be if she were freed and got together with him. She suggested as much and Sirianni smiled a willingness.

"I want you to tell me everything that happened so that when I get on the stand to testify for you I won't be caught in a lie. Now, from what you've said so far, I want to know if this Upshaw guy was with you that night."

"Oh, no, I don't know him. Never saw him."

"What about Baxter Shorter?"

"Don't worry about him. He won't be at the trial."

"Do you know that as a fact that he won't be there?"

"I can only assure you he won't be there. If I wasn't sure he wouldn't be there, I wouldn't say so."

"You were with Perkins, Santo, True, and Baxter that night, weren't you? Now listen, I want to know everything down the line. This may be our last meeting."

"I'll speak to my attorney."

Sirianni was insistent. "Perkins, True, Santo and Baxter, that's what I want to know, if you were with those four guys the night of the Monohan thing when everything happened at that place."

"Yes, I was with them."

"Now, then, where did this murder take place? When I get on the stand I want to know everything so I can say where we were that night."

Barbara became nervous at the line of questioning and changed the subject. She said she would like him to see a motel clerk in Encino to fake a registration for the night of last March 9, the date of the murder. "We can use the name of Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Clark of San Francisco."

"We've got to get this straight. I don't want to make an ass of myself in court because the $500 I'm

getting for this is just chicken feed."

"I was under the impression I was going to pay you more." Here Barbara laughed lightly at the suggestion of the favors she promised. Sirianni ignored the remark.

There was more to their conversation, all of it damning to Barbara. She reiterated the fact that Shorter would not be at the trial and when pressed for assurance declared that "he's been done away with. He won't be at the trial."

Assistant state's attorney lost no time in getting the trial under way. He called for his star witness, John True, after the court granted his move to dismiss the murder indictment against True. The tall, husky deep sea diver came into the courtroom surrounded by nine police officers and walked to the witness stand without looking at any of the defendants. They all ignored him.

True's testimony, from start to finish, regarding the murder and robbery that backfired into a tragic and senseless death of an innocent and crippled old woman shocked the packed courtroom. There was an unmistakable aura of horror over the assembled crowd as True continued his testimony.

"Mr. True," Alexander asked, "on the ninth day of March, 1953, did you go to the Monohan home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who accompanied you?"

"Jack Santo, Emmett Perkins, Barbara Graham, and Baxter Shorter."

"Who gave instructions?"

"Jack Santo."

"Did you observe if Barbara had a gun at the time?'

"I didn't at that time, no."

Previously, True testified that Emmett Perkins had given him a gun. "I didn't dare refuse to take it. I went in the door after Barbara entered and I saw her hitting Mrs. Monohan in the face with a gun. Mrs. Monohan was begging for mercy."

"What did you do?"

"I grabbed the lady by the face. Well, Barbara had been hitting her with a gun and Mrs. Monohan was begging for mercy. She was groaning all the time. I asked Barbara not to hit her any more. Mrs. Monohan collapsed then."

"What happened then?"

"First Barbara pulled a pillow case over the lady's head and Perkins tied her hands behind her back and said, 'Let's get her away from the door.' I had her head lying in my lap and I held her head off the floor and we dragged her around the corner and put her in a closet, and I said, 'Don't put her in there.' I took my knife—this pillowcase was over her head—and I cut the case across where she could breathe. Everyone else was going through the house, opening doors and rummaging through the house, and Jack Santo came by with some kind of cloth and tied it around her neck real tight and told me to get looking for a safe. I looked around and

couldn't find anything but a floor furnace and a disposal unit. I then went into the kitchen and saw Santo there. Mrs. Monohan was moaning and I believe it was Shorter said, 'I will stop that racket,' or something to that effect."

"What did you do next?"

"I went back into the hall and cut the straps around her face."

"Did you do anything with the pillowcase?"

"Yes, I did. I cut holes in it. I tore it open so she could breathe."

Alexander walked dramatically to the counsel table, picked up two blood-matted white cloths and showed them to True. The cloths were clipped at either end. True identified them as the ones he had cut from the body of Mrs. Monohan. He also identified other items used to cover Mrs. Monohan's head and to bind her.

The defense hammered at True savagely, at this pack of lies he recited under oath. They tried to shake his story that he went with the mob only to steal money and not to inflict injury on anyone, least of all an old, crippled woman. Defense Attorney Ward Sullivan was exceptionally vicious in his attack on True's story.

"You stated that you wanted to quit and run after you saw Barbara beating Mrs. Monohan, is that correct?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"Then why didn't you run? Why didn't you turn around and run? Run right out of the house?" Sullivan roared.

"Because I was afraid! If you had been in my place, you wouldn't have walked out either. Not and lived to get to the door!"

Sullivan then attacked True on the fact of his pandering his testimony for immunity. "You received immunity for payment for your testimony, did you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you hadn't received immunity, would you still have been willing to cleanse that dark heart of yours and testify as to the events of the night of March 9?" There was deep scorn in Sullivan's voice.

There was an immediate objection by Assistant D.A. Alexander which Judge Fricke overruled.

"You haven't answered my question!" Sullivan persisted.

True fidgeted in his seat and wet his lips with his tongue. He found Jack Santo staring at him with cold eyes and turned his head. There was a weighty silence in the courtroom and only the ticking of the clock on the wall could be heard as the silence continued.

Sullivan took several steps toward the witness stand, stared at True for several seconds.

"No more questions," he spat out and turned away. He glanced at the jury and shook his head in an expressive gesture of disgust.

William Upshaw followed John True to the witness stand. He had backed out of the robbery because,

for one reason, he feared to get involved with Santo and Perkins. He repeated the same story he told police in April and May when he was questioned after the kidnaping of Baxter Shorter. Sullivan and Jack Hardy, the two defense attorneys, made short work of Upshaw. They riddled him full of holes and exposed him as a cheap hoodlum who would sell his own mother for the price of a meal and a drink.

The most dramatic, and sensational, testimony came next when Samuel Sirianni was called to the stand. As he walked past the counsel table Barbara's icy aplomb failed and her face turned white. She knew instantly that she had been tricked by Donna Prow. Whatever hope she had entertained to win an acquital up to that moment deserted her.

Sirianni related his meeting with Barbara in the county jail and the conversation he had with her which, he stated, was recorded. As Sirianni testified, Santo and Perkins glared at Barbara with evil hatred. Santo whispered across the counsel table to her.

"You damned stupid bitch!"

Barbara turned her head to hide the sudden tears that flooded her eyes. She realized at that moment that all her life she had permitted herself to be used, that it was her gullibility, a weakness often born of desperation to save herself from the pits of her own making, that drew her into deeper hells.

Attorney Jack Hardy was dismayed. He made a valiant attempt to recover some ground for Barbara and fought gallantly for her. He was sick at heart at the sudden turn of events. He rose to address the Court.

"Your Honor, I have instructed my client from the outset to level with me at all times, to always tell me the truth and not to conceal anything from me. I feel at this moment that I have been thrust into an untenable situation as concerns my defense of my client. I respectfully ask the Court, because of what has occurred, to allow me to withdraw from this case as attorney for defendant Barbara Graham."

"Denied," Judge Fricke said cryptically. "You will continue with your defense, to the very best of your talents and ability as is due the defendant. Court is recessed for one hour."

Hardy's motion to withdraw from the case injured Barbara more than if Hardy assumed the position of a witness and testified that Barbara had admitted the murder to him. The several newspapermen in the courtroom glared at him as he walked by. They had noted the jury's reaction and felt that Hardy's speech was the grossest kind of misconduct for an attorney defending a client in a capital crime.

Hardy took over the defense ably after court resumed but he knew he was fighting a losing battle. Barbara knew it. Jack Santo and Emmett Perkins knew it.

Barbara's alibi witnesses were

gored. Her estranged husband, Henry, was dissolved into dirty little crumbs under the scathing cross-examination by Adolph Alexander.

He testified that he had a violent argument with Barbara on the night of March 9, but it was proved by unemployment records that he had actually left home on March 7, and that he did not see Barbara again for several weeks after. The defense was falling apart, bit by bit.

A fourteen-year-old neighbor, Connie Perez, testified that she had heard Barbara and her husband quarreling violently on the night of March 9. Alexander proved she was mistaken and impeached her testimony by producing records of the General Hospital, signed by two different ambulance drivers, that Connie had been picked up at 7:00 A.M. for treatment of her polio condition and that she had been returned to her home after 9:00 P.M.

Barbara then took the stand in her own defense. She testified that she had tried to establish the false alibi because she could not "remember where I actually was the night of the murder. I do know that I was not in Burbank, and certainly at no time have I ever been at or seen the home of Mrs. Monohan."

Alexander cross-examined her in a tone of light contempt, grinned when she responded to his questions to indicate he was aware they were falsehoods. He was almost gallant in his treatment of her, assuming the role of a man who knows he is talking with a doomed young woman.

Emmett Perkins called his wife and sister to testify in his defense. They both stated that Emmett had been planting a tree in the yard of their home on March 7, and so could not have been in El Monte on March 7.

A dental nurse took the stand and testified that Perkins had an appointment at her office the morning of March 10, and so he could not have been a fugitive eluding the police.

Jack Santo called his common-law wife to the stand, who stated that Santo could not have been in Burbank on the night of March 9, because he was with her in Grass Valley. Her appearance on the witness stand was the biggest mistake of her life.

After she had left the stand another witness, Jack Furneaux, a Modesto truck salesman, testifed that he knew Harriet Henson intimately, and that she was with him one morning when she laid out a plan for an alibi that would place Jack Santo out of the vicinity of Burbank on the fateful night of the murder.

"I had contacted the attorney general's office," Furneaux stated, "and I as given a miniphone recorder to wear when I talked with Miss Henson. (It was the same type of instrument Sirianni wore when he talked with Barbara.) I recorded our entire conversation, and during

our conversation Miss Henson admitted to me that Jack Santo and Emmett Perkins had killed a Nevada City gold miner, Ed Hanson, during a robbery in 1951, and that Miss Henson had taken part in the robbery and murder."

That was the end of Santo's chances for acquittal. As Harriet Henson attempted to leave the courtroom she was arrested by Sheriff Wayne Brown of Nevada City on a murder warrant.

It took the jury only five hours of deliberation to find a verdict of guilty for all three defendants. The foreman of the jury handed the slip of paper with the jury's verdict on it to Clerk Cecil Luskin who read it in a somber voice.

"We the jury find Jack Santo guilty of murder in the first degree with no recommendation for mercy." It was the same for Emmett Perkins. And the same for Barbara Graham.

Barbara's icy composure melted when the verdict was read and she broke into violent sobbing. Later, in the county jail visiting room, she was faced with a dozen reporters and cameramen.

"How do you feel about the verdict, Barbara?" a reporter asked.

"I just can't believe it," she replied tearfully. "I just can't believe it." She refused to answer further questions or to pose for pictures.

Jack Hardy was relieved of his duties as defense counsel for Barbara after receiving the thanks of Judge Fricke for "serving at great expense and personal sacrifice."

Al Matthews, a noted trial lawyer, now came into the case on the automatic appeal. He made an emotional appeal for a new trial and referred to Judge Fricke as the 13th juror. He was severely scolded by Judge Fricke, who turned down the appeal.

Matthews, widely known for his violent opposition to the death penalty, fought the appeal through the California Supreme Court and the U. S. Supreme Court. He was turned down in each instance.

Santo and Perkins were removed to San Quentin's death row and Barbara was taken to the Corona State Prison for Women to begin her long wait.

Through two long years in Corona's solitary confinement cell Barbara never ceased protesting her innocence of the Monohan murder. All appeals having failed, Judge Fricke set the date of execution for June 3, 1955.

The execution was agonizingly delayed on several occasions and the delays nearly ended capital punishment in California. She made two statements to the press before going to her death. One, to Eddy Jo Bernal of the Los Angeles *Herald-Express,* in which she said:

"I am ready to die. If it is God's will that I die then I shall go to my death with no malice towards anyone. I've always had pride and dignity, and I hope I will go to the

gas chamber with my head held high. I am at peace with myself and God. Death would be a relief from this hell!"

Her other statement was made to a matron. She said, "My downfall was the love of beautiful clothes. jewels, furs, and fancy cars. I have done many things to get them but not murder. And I don't feel that I have been a really bad person."

As the hour approached for her execution Barbara still insisted she was innocent. She refused to see Lt. Jack McCreadie of the Los Angeles homicide detail, who had been hoping to get some last-minute information from her on the disappearance of Baxter Shorter.

At 9:05 p.m. two petitions for writs in behalf of Barbara were filed with the Supreme Court. Fifteen minutes later, Governor Knight ordered a delay in the execution to give the court time to consider the petitions.

By this time Barbara was fully dressed in the neat suit she had worn during her trial. Her makeup had been carefully applied and her dark hair was neatly combed. Her only jewelry was her wedding band and a pair of glittering rhinestone earrings.

Barbara was told of the postponement at 9:25. She had been waiting tensely in her cell with the chaplain, Father Edward Dingberg, and Father McAlister. Her spirits rose as the execution time came and went and she hoped against hope that no news was good news.

One more postponement followed and Barbara cried out in the deepest kind of anguish. "Why do they torture me like this! I want to die! Let's get it over with!"

The final word came at last. All motions denied. Warden Teets then set the time for Barbara's execution at 10:45. She let out a deep sigh and resigned herself to death.

She walked with firm steps toward the gas chamber, her head held high. She managed to smile weakly in reply to Warden Teets' farewell, "Good-by and God bless you." And then she walked into the gas chamber.

She spoke her last words to the chaplain as the guards blindfolded her, and as the stethoscope on her chest was connected to the gauge outside the chamber and the straps placed around her thin body, she repeated the "Ave."

A guard asked her if the straps were too tight. She shook her head. The last guard gave her a friendly pat on the shoulder and whispered, "Count to ten and take a deep breath."

The eyes of the newspapermen who stood five feet from the windows of Barbara's tomb were fixed on her body and face. They saw her lips move in prayer, watched her cling to life for a few seconds more as her lips closed tightly, and then she opened her mouth and let out her soul.

"I thought of something I forgot story, every bit of conversation you

COPS WORK ON HOLIDAYS

Many men had wanted her, a few had possessed her. Now she lay waiting for her last, pale lover — stark Murder!

by MAX VAN DERVEER

SAM CHAMPAGNE had pounded concrete for six years and four months, got blisters on his feet, rode a patrol car for three years and seven months, got blisters on his posterior, then made detective.

The only trouble was somebody forgot to tell Sam Champagne that when you're among the rookies on the detective team you draw all of the holiday tricks. Like this quiet, stifling Fourth of July Friday afternoon, a very lazy afternoon on which to commit murder.

Ben Martin, another rookie detective, caught the call. At first, he did not believe it. Murder in the middle of the afternoon on the Fourth of July? That's crank stuff. Which is exactly what Ben Martin figured he had until the guy on the other end of the line demanded superiors.

The guy on the other end of the line sounded like a man who was used to demanding high echelon people—and got them. This disturbed Martin. Who needs a superior jarred from his cold beer on a steamy holiday afternoon? So Martin finally put the crank stuff aside and said the detectives would be right out to 7000 Apple Drive. The address didn't sound like crank territory, anyway. 7000 Apple Drive was plush terrain.

Which is what Randy Howell, a third rookie detective, thought too.

world for some word or clue that a call from Indian George.

Gosh! Don't kill me! Please don't— Baby-sitting is
kill me!" mobster; Baxter Shorter; Indian

Howell put on his shoes and knotted laces.

"Apple Drive is Honeysuckle Row," he said. "I mean nobody on Apple Drive worries about when he's gonna buy his next Rolls. These days it's just who's gonna make the thing?"

The girl lay in a fetal position beside a large pool table. She lay on a black tile floor of a game room in a fancy air-conditioned two-story brick and stone palace out in a neighborhood where the Fourth of July celebrations began the Wednesday before.

She lay naked in body flesh that had been tanned by many suns, except for the snow-white strip across her hips and a tiny pencil mark across her back. Her flesh was smooth and unmarked and looked good enough to touch, even in death. No telltale puncture marks on this doll. The narc had not been her banana. The lone blemish was a bruise along her jaw line.

She lay with gold hair down to her shoulders and the top of a purple bikini twisted around her neck. Her mouth was open, a bloody tongue stuck out between clamped teeth, and her eyes bugged. She also had bled from the nose, rather profusely. Most important, someone had garroted her.

Her name was Tina Polk. Until a killer had whipped the purple bikini top around her neck she probably had been a beautiful and vital girl, the kind of girl cops only dream about. She certainly had had the facial and body lines. True, she wasn't so damned attractive now, not biting into a protruding tongue and with her eyes popped.

"Sam?"

He stood at one of the several long windows in the game room wall looking out on a large swimming pool and surrounding apron. There were people out there, perhaps fifteen people, attired in varied swim togs, including a striking, long-legged girl in white blouse and green shorts and with a small camera dangling from a neck strap.

She sat in a cluster of three, and Sam Champagne thought she was extremely attractive. An hour ago the girl and the others had been raising hell, he figured, in the water and at the portable bar across the way. Now they were huddled, subdued, not sure of what to do or where to go. Even the bar had closed.

Down at the far end of the pool and off the apron, a lanky Negro boy in yellow shirt and tan slacks sat on the grass. He was staring, unmoving, at the house, as much ignoring the party crowd as they were ignoring him.

"Sam, what do we do now?"

He glanced at the door to his left. It was closed, but it opened on to the pool apron. He turned back into the room. Martin and Howell were squatted on the other side of the girl. They looked as if they were staring on moon rock.

er admit a stranger into the house and come back here. We've got a

They moved around to the back side of the girl.

"Where's her bottoms?" Howell asked. "I thought bikinis always came in two strips."

"Maybe the killer wanted a souvenir of his handiwork," said Martin. "Sam, what's the make on her? You get anything out of those three guys out there in the other room, the welcoming committee?"

The "three guys out there in the other room" had been waiting for the detectives when they had arrived at 7000 Apple Drive. Sam had had a brief, unorganized exchange with them. The preliminary make on the girl was: she had been wealthy, married, divorced, married again, widowed and spurned (in that order). At twenty-six, she was sort of a sock-it-to-me kind of girl who had collected plenty of lumps.

"Zowie," breathed Howell.

"A swinger," said Martin.

"I'm going to talk to them again," said Sam. "Howell, how about if you stick with the girl, guide the technicians when they get here? Ben, take that crowd at the pool. We need names, addresses, whatever anyone can give you."

Sam went into the next room, a den. The trio was not where he had left them. He went on toward the front of the house, found them in a vast living room.

The dead girl was the subject of a heated discussion. He could feel the charged atmosphere. The small ashen man in bright yellow swim trunks was pacing. The ruddy father type whose sun-pinked belly hung over flowered trunks, fiddled with an unlighted cigar. The Mexican-American, dressed in blue blazer and bell bottom gray trousers, sat scowling in a barrel chair. None acknowledged Sam's arrival.

"Tina was drinking too much lately," said the ashen man, moving back and forth in a short path near a window. "She needed clinical assistance. I attempted to help her."

"She had reason to drink," said the ruddy man. "Roger's death was a severe blow."

"Hell, she was an alcoholic," snapped the athletic Mexican-American.

"She wouldn't have been if she had listened to me," said the ashen man, shooting a piercing glance at

the Mexican-American. "No one understood her like I did."

"Then how come she divorced you, doctor, and married Roger?" countered Ruddy, chomping on the cigar.

"She didn't know where she was going. She never knew where she was going, or why," said the Mexican-American.

It earned him two piercing looks this time. Then the ashen man pushed on: "It had to be a sexual attack."

"What I can't figure," said Ruddy, "is why we didn't hear her scream. We were just outside."

"She didn't scream," said the Mexican-American. "She was probably enjoying—"

"Damn it," Ramirez," flared the ashen man, "you're flogging a dead girl! You were to marry her! Remember?"

"That was her idea," said the Mexican-American sourly. "Not mine."

"Gentlemen," put in Sam Champagne, "may I take it from here?"

The trio went silent. They stared at him as if he was an unwanted intruder. The ashen man was sad-eyed, the ruddy man defiant-eyed, the Mexican-American hostile-eyed. From this friendly little group Sam already had learned:

(1) That the ashen man was Dr. James Franklin Benz, surgeon, once married to Tina *nee* Polk—she preferred her maiden name after the divorce. He currently was residing in this brick and stone house, had been for the last four and a half months, give or take a day or two. He had been even though he no longer was married to said Tina Polk, now deceased. Dr. James Franklin Benz was "still very much in love," as it were, with one Tina Polk, did in fact and deed still own this plush barrier against the natural environment, and had returned to the nest and taken a room following the death of Tina Polk's second husband, a stock broker named Roger Caldwell Jr.

Caldwell had plunged into a Colorado mountain top in his own private plane six months and six days after marrying the divorcee Tina Polk. Tragic. Yes, the death of Roger Caldwell Jr. had been tragic. And Tina had needed help in those dark days, needed someone in the house to comfort and support and lift her. Thus the return of the doctor.

But just what had Tina Polk had to say about this return? Well, she had been receptive, perhaps not enthusiastic. She hadn't held open the door while the doctor had hauled clothing and posessions up to what had once been a guest bedroom on the second floor. But she hadn't shut the door either. She hadn't argued one way or the other. If the doctor wanted to room in this fancy brick and stone abode, well, the doctor could take a room. Just don't be toodling after her all the time, like a little boy. She hated little boys. She hated children.

Sam Champagne also had learned:

(2) That the ruddy man with the hanging pink belly was Roger Caldwell Sr., insurance executive and father of Roger Caldwell Jr., now deceased, who, along with Mrs. Caldwell Sr. had during Roger Caldwell Jr.'s brief marriage to Tina Polk come to know and adore Tina Polk Caldwell, and had retained that kinship since Roger Caldwell Jr.'s untimely demise, even though the friendship may have paled slightly.

After all, Roger hadn't been around lately, so naturally, the attraction had been perhaps infinitesimally less. Roger Caldwell Sr., insurance executive, ex-father-in-law, adoring friend, also had been the guy who had discovered the body and called the cops.

Sam Champagne further had learned:

(3) That the MexicanAmerican was Richard Ramirez, professional at the Racquet Club, a very exclusive club with semiannual dues that made it prohibitive for the poor, the middle class, and the upper middle class to belong and which further barred Jews, Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Indians, rebels, freethinkers, dissenters, demonstrators, protesters, anti-Americans, not necessarily in that order. But had hired a Mexican-American to teach tennis because said Mexican-American probably was one of the best damn tennis players and tennis teachers in the world today.

The tennis player also happened to be a very special friend of one Tina Polk, who was not only a member of the Racquet Club, but was a vice president and on the board that made ethnic decisions and who had found Richard Ramirez on the professional tennis tour one day and had immediately professed to fall in love with his athletic body and dark complexion and charming manners.

The only trouble being she had not discovered until recently that he, Richard Ramirez, was not so hot on marrying one Tina Polk until Tina Polk agreed to give up the doctor's house; give up the doctor; give up drinking; give up the Racquet Club; have kids. Dick Ramirez liked kids. He wanted a houseful of kids and a mother to brood over them.

Sam Champagne got down to the nitty-gritty. He asked, "Gentlemen, who killed Tina Polk and why?"

The response was titanic. None of the trio said a word. Which is a cop's lot sometimes.

Sam turned methodical. "I want to have a little talk with each of you individually. I'll begin with you, doctor, if you other two gentlemen will excuse us."

The other two gentlemen left the room. Slowly. Reluctantly. Caldwell seemed to want to listen. Ramirez may have taken personal affront at the temporary dismissal. It was difficult for Sam to tell.

He faced the ashen man. "Doctor, I find this relationship between you and an ex-wife to be a rather—well,

shall we say *different* communion?"

Benz shrugged. He was near total baldness and he obviously had not spent much time in the sun. You could guess him at forty or fifty years of age. Sam took forty.

"Roger Caldwell's death upset Tina terribly," he said. "I've been attempting to be salve."

"And perhaps re-establish your one-time marital relationship?"

"That too," he nodded. "I don't deny it. I love—loved her."

"You seem a bit older than—"

"I am."

Benz suddenly was defiant. Some color crept into his face. And Sam immediately decided to get off the age kick. He didn't know anything about age in relationship to marriage. Hell, he didn't know anything about marriage. He'd never been in love.

"There are domestics in the house, I believe," he said.

"Two. Roscoe and Amelia Bales. I employed them shortly after Tina and I married. They've been with Tina since." He hesitated, chewed his lower lip.

"Yes?" Sam prodded.

Benz clipped the words. "And there is the boy. Oliver Johnson. He has been chauffeuring Tina the past two months. She lost her driver's license. Too many speeding tickets."

"Oliver Johnson was not employed by you?"

"He was not."

"He was employed by Miss Polk."

"He was."

"Doctor, I have the impression you do not like Oliver Johnson, nor the idea of him chauffeuring your —"

"Let's just say I would not have employed him, sergeant, and let it go at that."

"Why wouldn't you have employed him, doctor?"

"He's a Negro."

The color in Benz' cheeks was high now. And Sam took a flyer: "And Richard Ramirez is a Mexican-American. Is that why you dislike him?"

"One of the reasons."

"Another being he and your former wife apparently were contemplating marriage."

"She has been under the influence of alcohol, in one form or another, since the death of Roger Caldwell. She was in no mental or emotional condition to discuss anything."

"But did she intend to marry Ramirez?"

"She was infatuated with him, no more."

"From his remark of a moment ago, I gather he hasn't been so hep on this possible wedding."

"It's his attitude now."

"You mean—"

"I mean Tina is dead! If she were alive, you'd see Mr. Ramirez purring all over her. It was sickening."

"Why would he change so quickly?"

"Defense. He doesn't want to be involved. I'm surprised he hasn't already bolted. Mr. Ramirez is a fair weather lover, sergeant, a fair weather man. When the ship is rocked, he likes to be on shore. He became trapped this time."

"Trapped?"

"Poor selection of word. He was here when murder was committed. If he had had a choice I'm sure he would have been far away."

"Perhaps he is the murderer."

"Perhaps. He could have killed Tina, I suppose. It would have been an emotional thing, of course. She was an independently wealthy girl and Ramirez had an eye on that wealth, I'm sure, so if he did kill her the act probably was emotionally triggered. Maybe she came to her senses, told him to get lost. That would have angered him. Yes, that could have happened."

"Earlier I heard you say something about this being a sex killing. Do you have evidence, doctor?"

"No. I saw her naked there on the floor, the swim suit stripped from her . . . "

"Of ocurse, committing a violent sex act so close to the other guests does seem a bit far fetched. For instance, I assume anyone could have opened the door from the pool to the game room at any given moment and walked in."

"The door was locked. From the inside."

"Oh?"

"It shouldn't have been," Benz continued with a wave of his hand. "It wasn't earlier. There is a bath off the game room, the only bath near the pool. So the game room door was never locked when we had guests. But today, when Caldwell attempted to open the door, he found it locked. It puzzled him, so he looked in a window, thinking there might be someone inside who had inadvertently locked the door. That's when he saw Tina."

"Do you think she might have locked the door? Perhaps she entered the house with someone and did not wish to be disturbed."

"I don't like that inference, sergeant," Benz snapped.

"I have to consider all possibilities, doctor. I believe I heard someone say no one outside heard a scream, therefore, I must consider the possibility that Tina Polk was in the game room with someone who did not frighten her. Incidentally, do you think one of the women guests could have killed her?"

"I sincerely doubt it. Few women have the strength to strangle another person, especially if the intended victim is struggling."

"And you're assuming Tina Polk struggled. There is very little evidence of a struggle."

"She struggled," Benz said flatly.

"Was she intoxicated this afternoon?"

"Not that intoxicated."

"Well, there's a bruise along her jawline. I'm going to guess a little and say that she was struck with a fist, perhaps knocked unconscious, then strangled. Of course, she could have been bruised in the fall to the floor."

"Either could have happened."

"She could've been struck without warning. This could be the reason no one outside heard a scream or any noise of a struggle. It could be the reason there was no struggle."

"A possibility, yes," Benz nodded.

"I believe you said you were sitting in a lounge chair at poolside when Caldwell discovered the body."

"Yes, but I wasn't keeping a checklist of the comings and goings of the guests. I doubt that anyone was. People drift at these kind of parties, sergeant."

"I see you have a knack for anticipation, doctor. I thought you might have been keeping a special eye on Tina Polk. You once were married to her, you profess love for her, you have been living in this house with her. Under those conditions I thought you might have noticed when she left the pool area, who might have accompanied her—or if someone later entered the house."

"There are four entries to this house, sergeant, and only one is in sight of anyone in the pool area. But the other doors are easily entered. Also someone could already have been inside the house."

"Where were the domestics working this afternoon?"

"Bales was tending bar at the pool. Mrs. Bales was keeping the snack trays filled from the kitchen. People can be in the house and Mrs. Bales would not be aware of them, the kitchen is that isolated. It's in the left wing, and there is a direct exit to the outside."

Sam again was acutely aware of the doctor's anticipation. Then Benz surprised him. He said, "If I have to pick potential killers, sergeant, I will name Richard Ramirez, Oliver Johnson and/or Walter Shanks. Ramirez could have been triggered by frustration or anger. With Johnson

and Shanks, it would have been lust. Both lusted for Tina.

"As to opportunity, I recall that Ramirez was not at the pool for a long spell this afternoon, Walter Shanks departed from the grounds early, and the Negro boy, of course, knew he was to remain in his quarters over the garage unless called for. Of course, this does not mean he was chained there."

"And who," Sam asked, "is Walter Shanks?"

"A rather ugly young man—in physical appearance, in attitude, and in manner. But wealthy, a bachelor, and a ladies' man. Walter Shanks lusts, sergeant. And he attains. In Tina's case, however, he was still lusting."

It was Sam's turn to surprise, he figured. "Well, doctor, you really didn't have to volunteer. I wasn't going to ask for your nominations. But thanks anyway. And now if you will be good enough to tell Mr. Caldwell I'd like to talk to him—"

Roger Caldwell Sr. never in his life had smoked. Smoking was dangerous to health: "Take it from an insurance man, one who insures lives." But he liked to fondle and chew on cigars. It gave off a certain impression, and Roger Caldwell Sr. liked to impress; it was good for business. On the other hand, he did not wear a blindfold, he was not easily impressed — or hoodwinked. It was a talent, he admitted grandly, but it did allow him to categorize people.

And just how had he sized up a few of the people at this July 4th blast?

Well, the doctor had the reputation of being one hell of a surgeon, a man in demand, and he was wealthy, no doubt about that. He was also popular, apparently enjoyed good health, and seemed stable enough on the surface.

But the guy had tumbled out of his tree over Tina Polk.

Ramirez? Ramirez was a slick. Ramirez had moved in swiftly after the death of Roger Caldwell Jr., caught Tina Polk in an extremely emotional period in her life, knocked her off balance, and had kept her off balance. Ramirez should not have done that. Ramirez was not one of Roger Caldwell Sr.'s favorite people. Now, who else did the sergeant want an opinion on?

"Walter Shanks."

"A professional seducer."

"What was he doing here?"

"I suppose he was invited by Tina, but perhaps he came uninvited. Shanks does those kind of things."

"I understand he left the party early. Did you happen to notice him leave?"

"I did."

"Any idea what time it might have been?"

"Not the foggiest. But you could ask Connie Lennon. She's out at the pool. I was at the bar with Miss Lennon, she was developing a headache, and Benz came along. She

asked for medication, he volunteered something. It was while he was gone that Miss Lennon and I saw Shanks drive away. He squealed tires all the way down the drive. Anyway, Miss Lennon might remember the approximate time."

"Was Tina Polk at the pool when Shanks left?"

"I think she was. Well, I'm really not sure, now that you ask. She could have been, or she might not have been. I don't know, sergeant. There was a crowd out there this afternoon, a good number of people moving around."

"How long was this before you discovered the body?"

"Say twenty minutes, maybe thirty."

"Why did you try to enter the house?"

"A human function, young man. And when I found the locked door, it irritated me. I looked through a window to see if there was someone inside who could open the door."

"And saw the body. Who do you think killed her, Mr. Caldwell?"

His face darkened. He stared at the cigar. "I wish I knew. I'd be tempted to kill him."

"Because you still consider Tina Polk to be your daughter-in-law?"

"Because," he said flatly

"Do you think Walter Shanks might have killed her?"

"I don't think Walter Shanks would kill any woman. He lives on them."

"How about this Oliver Johnson, the house boy?"

Caldwell looked startled. "Wow, Doc really unloaded on you, didn't he?"

"He wears his bigotry, if that's what you mean."

"That's what I mean."

"This thing could be a sex crime, Mr. Caldwell. We're going to know for sure in a few hours."

Caldwell shook his head. "Not the Johnson boy."

"All right, then. Would Benz kill her?"

"My God, man, he was living here with her. If he wanted to kill her why would he pick the middle of a day when guests are all around?"

"It'd be better than doing it some night when he was alone in the house with her. We'd have him for sure then, wouldn't we? Incidentally, how did your son happen to meet and marry Tina Polk?"

"They met through Connie Lennon. Roger and Connie were dating at the time. After Tina divorced Benz, she began to circulate among the younger people again. She and Roger met, fell in love, were married. Innocent enough?"

"Seems to be. Then enters Richard Ramirez into Tina's life?"

"After Roger's death."

"And Tina fell in love again."

"Unfortunately, she seemed to be captivated by Ramirez, yes."

"She intended to marry him?"

"So she said."

"But he was hedging."

"I'm not sure about that. Something wasn't clicking just right between them, but—"

"Perhaps Ramirez killed her to get out of what he considered to be a tight spot."

"You'd have to ask Ramirez about that."

Sam waned to ask Richard Ramirez several questions. He was too late. Ramirez had disappeared from the house and grounds.

When detectives blow one they wish they were motor pool mechanics and their only problems were leaky transmission seals. Ben Martin stood ruffling his red hair, Randy Howell stared in disgust, the technicians departed with the body, and Sam Champagne put out a pick-up for Richard Ramirez.

Martin finally said, "What about all of those people outside, Sam? Some want to cut. They're beginning to grumble."

"I'd like to talk to a girl named Connie Lennon. Which one is she?"

"The girl with the camera dangling against her front."

"The others can go, I guess."

Connie Lennon impressed Sam. At a distance, she had been striking. In close proximity, inside the air-conditioned house, out of the stinking heat of the afternoon, she was blood-stirring, collected, alert and totally sober.

Connie Lennon did not drink. She also was terribly puzzled about the death by violence of Tina Polk. Connie Lennon did not like violence. She was gentle by nature.

Yes, she had known Tina most of her life. Yes, she had introduced Tina to Roger Caldwell Jr. No, the marriage of Tina and Roger had not disturbed her; she, Connie Lennon, was not the marrying kind. She preferred independence. To date she had not met a man she thought she could live with the rest of her life.

Well, Tina Polk obviously had been the marrying kind.

Tina had needed people. Alone she was a zero, her nerve ends clanged warning signals, all kinds of bad things could happen to her when she was alone, so she had turned to husbands.

And clubs, and pool parties and—

And?

Something was haywire here. Tina Polk had had a first husband, a man who still was very much alive and

proclaimed to be very much in love, a man of wealth, prominence, stature, a man—it would seem on the surface—who had much to offer a woman.

The only trouble being Doctor Benz, because of this wealth, prominence, stature and work, was absent too often from home and wife. Wife hears clanging bells again, panics, divorces.

Enters Roger Caldwell Jr.

Tina and Roger had fallen in love with each other, it's still possible. Roger's death was true tragedy for Tina.

So Tina began to drink heavily.

Yes.

And the doctor moved back into the house.

Tina was reaching for any straw that might blow past in those dark days.

Did Connie Lennon think Richard Ramirez to be a passing straw for Tina Polk?

In a sense. Connie Lennon did not think Tina Polk was in love with Richard Ramirez, not like she had been in love with Roger Caldwell. They argued too often. They had argued this very afternoon, for instance. Tina Polk wanted to announce to the party that she and Richard were to marry. Richard had refused. The announcement would come in due time and in the proper manner. Thus an argument. Richard had gone off some place on the grounds to brood and Tina had taken her anger into the house.

Connie Lennon seemed well informed.

Connie Lennon and Tina Polk had been close, often confided in one another. Women need some outlet; perhaps a police sergeant didn't know that.

Yes. Well now, had this argument taken place before or after she, Connie Lennon, had developed a headache—while standing at the pool bar with Roger Caldwell Sr., that is.

Hmm. The police sergeant seemed informed too. The argument had taken place before the headache.

And was Tina Polk intoxicated?

She had been drinking.

Had Connie Lennon seen Tina Polk go into the house, and had Tina Polk gone alone?

Tina Polk had been alone when she entered the game room and closed the door behind her.

Had anyone trailed Tina Polk, say a few minutes later?

If anyone had, Connie Lennon had not noticed—and she was quite sure she would have noticed, since she was a bit disturbed by Tina Polk's mood, Tina having just confided that Richard Ramirez was being an obstinate animal this afternoon and that she, Tina Polk, was terribly angry with one Richard Ramirez.

Said Richard Ramirez having by this time gone off some place to brood?

Yes.

Was Miss Lennon currently aware

that Richard Ramirez had disappeared again, left the grounds?

Miss Lennon was not. Why would he do that?

"Perhaps he is frightened and running," Sam said.

Connie Lennon frowned. "By inference, sergeant, I think you are saying that Richard may have killed Tina. I find that difficult to believe."

"Then you pick out a killer for me, Miss Lennon."

"I find that difficult to do."

"Well, try a man named Walter Shanks. It is my understanding that Mr. Shanks may have had a physical interest in Tina Polk."

"No more than in any other woman. Walter Shanks is a chaser."

"He also was observed driving away from the house this afternoon at a high rate of speed. In fact, I'm told you were one of the observers. Now, I must also consider that this quick departure seems to have taken place some time after Tina Polk had entered the house."

"Well, yes, it did."

"So perhaps Walter Shanks is frightened and running, too. Are you a photography buff, Miss Lennon?"

"I dabble. I have a darkroom. Why?"

"And you've been taking pictures this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"When they are printed, I'd like to have a set of those you took here."

She frowned prettily again.

Sam grinned suddenly and plunged. "I'd like to see the pictures tonight. There'll be compensation, of course. I'll take you to a movie some time."

Connie Lennon seemed mildly startled; then she laughed softly. "I assume the city will reimburse you for the cost of the movie.' '

"Naw, I'll stand it."

"We could go Dutch, of course."

"I hadn't considered that," Sam said thoughtfully.

Connie Lennon, leaving a phone number, went off to develop and print her pictures, and Sam, briefly lighthearted over the only good thing to happen to him this muggy holiday day, came back to earth when Ben Martin appeared and said, "There's a Negro boy outside, Sam, who wants to talk to us. He won't come into the house."

Oliver Johnson was nervous and worried. He knew Tina Polk was dead, but no one would tell him more, no one would even talk to him. What had happened? Why were the cops called to the house?

The cops explained and Oliver Johnson found what they told him difficult to believe. Wow, this was strictly a bad trip! Oliver Johnson suddenly had to see Mr. Caldwell.

And why did Oliver Johnson suddenly have to see Mr. Caldwell?

Well, maybe Mr. Caldwell should tell the cops about that.

The cops preferred to get it from Oliver Johnson.

You see, Oliver Johnson was a

college boy, that is, he had completed one year at JC here in the city. He was going back to school in the fall, but there was the summer, see, and he hadn't had a job and, well, he needed the bread and this job driving for Tina Polk had sorta dropped in his lap—

Aw, hell, tell it like it was. Oliver Johnson had nothing to hide, not really, not when Tina Polk had been murdered. Roger Caldwell Sr. was on the college board of trustees and one day he had gone through the files at school and found a Negro boy who needed work and he had approached Oliver Johnson with the offer to drive for Tina Polk.

Oliver Johnson had grabbed, but then, it developed, Roger Caldwell Sr. wanted a little footsie work done on the side; he wanted Oliver Johnson to sort of be a spy for him, keep an eye on Tina Polk, tell him who she went out with, where they went, that kind of jazz, for which Roger Caldwell Sr. had paid extra. And Oliver Johnson, needing bread bad, had sort of gone along with the plan, even though it made him feel down sometimes.

That is, Oliver Johnson occasionally got the blues when he let himself think about how he wasn't being square with Tina Polk, because Tina Polk was an all right cat, man, none of that looking down the nose jazz, not like the doctor. The doctor was bad, bad news. Oliver Johnson was low in this moment. He thought he would go back to his garage quarters and pack and cut, if it was all right with the cops.

The cutting, however, did not meet with the approval of the cops. The cops liked to keep everyone nice and available while they were investigating a murder. The cops got funny notions about people who cut and disappeared, especially when they might have a sex crime on their collective hands.

Sex crime? Oh-oh. Bad news! The cops were all of a sudden scaring hell out of a Negro boy.

Did the boy have reason to be frightened?

Not this boy, man! Ollie Johnson was clean, except maybe for that footsie bit for Caldwell. Oh, how had Ollie Johnson got himself into that one?

Well, Tina Polk had been an attractive woman.

Get off that, man! Ollie was in his quarters all afternoon, not paying any attention to the party folks, let 'em ball in the hot sun, who cared? No sireee, Ollie Johnson had not left his quarters until he heard all the commotion at the pool and knew that something had happened. Ollie Johnson had figured maybe somebody had drowned. Only then had he ventured outside.

Ollie, said the cops, we're gonna give it to you straight. No extra bread this time around, but we want to know about the men Tina Polk has been seeing since your employment.

One man, man. The tennis man.

No play on the side?

No play.

Well, maybe somebody has been coming to her door in the middle of the night. Of course, the doctor has been in the house; he probably would shoo off anyone who came to the door.

With a cannon, man.

The doctor owned a gun? The doctor was a man leaning to violence?

No, no, man. Ollie Johnson didn't say that. Cannon, man, that's an expression. Ollie Johnson didn't know about any gun or the doctor's temperament toward strangers in the night. Ollie Johnson stayed as far awav from the doctor as he could. In fact, that's why Ollie Johnson would like to cut now.

The cops returned to the downtown squadroom in thoughtful states of mind. They had sandwiches brought in and they got coffee in paper cups from the vending machine. Ben Martin was hot on Richard Ramirez as the killer since Ramirez had bolted. But Sam wanted to know why Ramirez had waited until the cops were on the premises and then bolted; it seemed to Sam that Ramirez could have killed and run.

"Well, maybe he, Ramirez, was going to fake it out with us at first but things got piling up too high in his mind and so he took the second opportunity to fly," Ben Martin said.

"Possible," Sam admitted.

Randy Howell wanted to talk to Walter Shanks. Had Shanks been inside the house when Tina Polk entered, had he moved in on her, been rebuffed, killed her in frustration? Even under attack, Tina Polk might not have cried out for help. Randy Howell had the impression that Tina Polk had figured she could handle her own problems—if she considered a sexual advance a problem at all.

Sam Champagne grunted and said they also could theorize that Tina had set up a rendezvous with someone—almost any male—at the party. Someone had locked the game room door—perhaps it was Tina—consented to a little horseplay, then found the horseplay going too far, attempted to back out, had been smacked down, raped and killed.

A spontaneous killing, nothing planned. So maybe what the cops needed to do was pick out males who had not been at the pool when Tina Polk was inside the house and speculate on motive, although it seemed no one really wanted Tina Polk dead, everyone wanted her alive.

However, the cops might as well begin with the male absences they knew about. There was Ramirez, who had had an argument with Tina over a marriage announcement, there was Shanks who supposedly lusted, there was Oliver Johnson who may have lusted too and who professed to have been in his garage quarters.

A technician entered the squadroom, carrying the preliminary lab report on the deceased. Tina Polk had not been sexually attacked, even if she had lost the bottom of her purple bikini.

Well, now, there went a bunch of theories into a cocked hat.

"So maybe someone stole Tina Polk's bottoms to make us think her death was a sex crime," said Sam. "How many doors does that open, gentlemen?"

The phone rang. Sam scooped it up, identified himself.

"Hey!" said the cheery voice in his ear. "Just the guy I wanted. I heard your name on the radio newscast. Tina Polk has been killed, huh, and you're the chief honcho investigating? Walter Shanks here. I was at that festival for a while this afternoon, then I had to fly. Had a little business down the street, you know?

"In fact, she's right here beside me now, cute little thing, too. But tell me, man what's the scene? Who did that dastardly thing to Tina-baby? Boy, that guy's gotta be unbalanced! Does he know what he removed from this planet?"

Randy Howell shot like a rocket out to converse with Walter Shanks, who said he wouldn't move an inch. Among other things, he wasn't finished with his "business" yet.

Ben Martin went downstairs to see if he could jack up the prowl boys, who supposedly were keeping an eye out for one Richard Ramirez, tennis professional.

Sam Champagne used the phone again, talked briefly with Connie Lennon, and then drove out to Apple Drive thinking that Connie Lennon had a very nice telephone voice too.

A bolt of lightning, in reality, can come out of almost any dark cloud to split a tree. Once in a while, just once in a while, a bolt of lightning can be a rookie detective working a frustrating homicide on a steamy holiday night in the presence of a beautiful young woman he wishes to impress and said rookie detective, slipping through a thick stack of freshly printed photographs taken at a pool party, noticing that one man in several of the photographs seemed to have changed bathing trunks in the middle of the pool party.

The girl said, "Well, yes, he did change. He was wearing red trunks early in the afternoon—the trunks are dark in those prints you're holding in your left hand, you notice—and yellow trunks after he changed. Look again at those prints in your right hand, his trunks seem white, actually were yellow, but in black and white photography—"

"This is important," said the detective. "Are you positive that these pictures in my left hand were taken before you developed your headache and these in my right hand were taken after you had received medication?"

"I'm sure," said the woman, "but

"Well, then?" Cal Harris said.

a slender man in dark, turtleneck

look. Can't a man change swim trunks? After all, some people don't like to sit in wet suits."

"If that was the reason he changed," said the detective, "then he has no problem."

It was almost one o'clock in the morning when Sam Champagne punched the door chimes at the fancy brick and stone mansion at 7000 Apple Drive and found that Doctor James Franklin Benz had not yet retired. In spite of air conditioning, Doctor James Franklin Benz had been reading.

What was so odd about that? Not a thing was odd about a man reading at one o'clock in the morning, Sam conceded. He often could be found reading at one o'clock in the morning. Especially when he was nervous, or upset, or had had a particularly trying day.

"But," said Sam, "it has come to my attention that you changed bathing suits some time during your pool party this — yesterday afternoon. You were wearing red trunks early in the afternoon and later you were wearing yellow trunks."

"S-so?" said a shaken Doctor James Franklin Benz.

"So I'd like to see the red trunks," said Sam. "I want to see if there are blood spots on them."

"Young man, you are forcing me to ask you to leave this house!"

"Doctor, you're forcing me to get damned nasty about all of this. I want to see those trunks!"

Doctor James Franklin Benz refused to produce the trunks, whereupon Detective Sam Champagne went upstairs without a search warrant, and found the trunks inside a dirty clothes hamper. There were blood spots on the trunks.

"Your former wife's blood, doctor?" asked Sam. He felt very triumphant for a rookie deetctive. "You entered the house, seeking headache medication for a guest. You found your ex alone in the game room. You struck her once, perhaps twice, making her nose bleed. She went down, was unconscious. You took the top of her bathing suit, strangled her. Afterward you stripped off the bottom, anything to make it look as if it had been a sex crime. But why did you kill her, doctor?"

Doctor James Franklin Benz sagged. "S-she—she taunted me."

"With a pending marriage?"

"She would have had babies, one after another. That's the way Mexicans are."

"Doctor," said Sam Champagne, shaking his head, "I feel sorry for you, and not only because you killed Tina Polk. But you goofed, friend. You should have destroyed these trunks. You were clicking when you killed, you put a couple of curves in our road. Then you drop a bloodied swim suit in a clothes hamper. Stupid."

"I'm used to having people pick up after me."

"Yeah? Well, I think those days are finished, doctor."

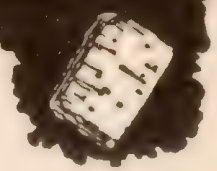
BEAUTY IN HIS BRAIN

He stood before me, the creature who had chosen to take away my loved one's mate. Now at last it was my turn . . .

by DANA BURNET

After the cellar, the reflected night quietly.

DEPARTMENT of LOST STORIES



A previously published story is not necessarily a permanently preserved story, available to anyone. Too often, in fact, it is just the opposite. So transitory is magazine publication alone —usually thirty days on sale—that far too many outstanding tales are overlooked and forgotten before they have their deserved chance at fame and recognition. Her, in this new de-department, you will read some of the most unusual stories ever written. "Beauty in His Brain," by Dana Burnet, is no exception. Mr. Burnet's stories have always been noted for their unusual and starkly dramatic climaxes. This one is ranked among his best. When you are fortunate enough to see a story called "Department of Lost Stories," remember that it is a work which in the judgment of a discriminating editorial board is too outstanding to be forgotten. The present short story is no exception. Read it. You'll not forget it for a while!

THE EDITORS

IT WAS AFTER dark of a chill winter evening. Lawyer Gail Morton was alone in his office, which was lighted only by his desk lamp and the faint reddish glow of a coal fire in an old-fashioned grate.

Sitting hunched over his desk, his chin in his big hands, Gail stared at a newspaper clipping, about four inches square, which lay under the lamp before him. The clipping revealed the blurred photograph of a woman whose faded prettiness had survived even the newsman's cruel camera. The caption with the picture read: *Mrs. George Pendexter, Whose Husband Was Killed in Local Cigar-Store Holdup.*

As he studied the picture, Gail's long, lean body drooped. His massive bony face looked haggard in the light. It was a face stamped with a Lincolnesque ugliness. This suggestion of a resemblance to the Great Emancipator had helped Gail enormously in his legal career. He was

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known as an honest man and the most successful lawyer in the large sprawling industrial town of Wakingham, Massachusetts.

Suddenly he straightened up and pulled his watch from his pocket. It was five minutes to seven. He put the clipping into his top desk drawer. He got up and walked to a closet beyond the fireplace. From the closet he took his overcoat and his black fedora hat. He put them on. He drew on his yellow pigskin gloves and buttoned them methodically. Then, instead of leaving the office, he went back to his desk and sat down—to wait.

In a few minutes he heard footsteps in the outer office. Immediately the door of his private office opened and a man stepped quickly, with a catlike movement, into the room.

The man was short and squat; swarthy. His eyes were black and cold, yet curiously glittering; the eyes of a wary animal — or of a gangster.

"I'm Johnny Bracco," he said in a taut, guttural voice.

Gail Morton nodded.

"Sit down, Bracco. I didn't know whether to expect you or not."

"You says seven o'clock, alone here in your office, and I—"

"Yes. But I wasn't sure you'd show up." Morton indicated his hat and coat. "As you see, I was ready to go home. But you're right on time."

"And you're alone, Mr. Morton?" The man's eyes were bright with suspicion.. The lawyer met his gaze frankly, calmly.

"Certainly. You may search the place if you want to."

Bracco sighed and sat down in a chair on the other side of the desk, facing Morton.

"No," he said. "I gotta trust somebody, and you're supposed to be a straight guy. That'll help me a lot, see? That's why I sent word to you I wanted you for my mouthpiece, see?" The dark man paused, and again the gleam of suspicion appeared in his eyes.

"But what I wanna know is why you was willin' to talk turkey with me this time, when you wouldn't never take no business off me before? You're the smartest lawyer in this town. I and my mob could of used you all durin' the prohibition racket, but you al'ays turned me down cold. What's changed you, Mr. Morton?"

"I'll answer your question in a moment," said Morton. "First, let's consider the facts. From what I've read in the papers, you have been arrested for complicity in the Pendexter case. You are now out on bail. Is that correct?"

"Yeah! But they ain't got a thing on me. They didn't have no right to pinch me. I could sue them damn dicks for false arrest. I—"

"You probably could," interrupted Morton. "Legally, no man can be arrested on an officer's suspicion. But practically it's done every day.

The chances are you'll go to trial, Bracco. Public opinion will demand it. The whole town is worked up over that Pendexter murder."

"It wasn't no murder, Mr. Morton! Honest it wasn't—"

"How do *you* know?" snapped Gail Morton suddenly.

"I—well, I read the papers too, see? And I seen where this guy Pendexter was found dead behind his counter with a gun in his hand. So nacherly we—I mean the other guy would of had to shoot in self-defense and—"

"Baloney, Bracco!" Gail Morton laughed briefly. "You certainly need a lawyer. You've practically admitted to me that you or your thugs killed that cigar-store clerk—"

"I never—"

"Don't lie to me, you rat!"

Involuntarily the gangster's right hand jerked toward his left shoulder, then fell limply to the desk.

"All right," Bracco said. "All right. I'll take that from you, on account I need you, see?"

"Then tell me the truth," Morton said sternly. "Or get out of my office. Jump your bail bond, and run away. That'll be as good as a confession. Then, when they catch you, you won't need a lawyer. You'll need a priest."

"Now wait, Mr. Morton. Don't get sore. I'll tell you the truth, see? Only first I wanna know why you're takin' this case. Are you my mouthpiece or ain't you—and *why*?"

Morton's homely face was an imperturbable mask.

"This Pendexter case," he said, "interests me. According to the newspapers, an innocent man was shot down in cold blood. There was no evidence of robbery, nor any other reason for the killing. From a legal standpoint the complete absence of motive interests me, Bracco. It fascinates me."

"Oh, yeah, Mr. Morton?" Once more the glittering black eyes darted suspicion. "So you're takin' the case because you're interested, huh? Just because you're interested!"

The worried skepticism in that harsh voice struck a note of warning in Gail Morton's brain. His expression changed; softened.

"Maybe you don't know it, Bracco," he said almost lightly, "but there has been a depression in the legal profession too."

"Huh? Oh, yeah. I get you, Mr. Morton."

"I take it you'd be willing to pay me well for my services?"

"Sure! There'll be five grand in

it for you anyways—just as a retainin' fee."

"Five thousand dollars! That's a lot of money, Bracco."

"I'm in a lot of trouble," growled the gangster.

Gail spoke slowly: "A man will do things for money that he wouldn't do for any other reason. You understand that, don't you, Bracco?"

The gangster grinned with relief, showing his ragged tobacco-stained teeth. He was on his own ground now.

"Sure! It's the best reason in the world for doin' anything, ain't it? Money! Why, sure, smart guy. I un'erstan' that, all right."

"Then let's have your story," said Gail Morton. He shoved a box of cigars across the desk. "Smoke?"

"Much obliged," grunted Bracco. He stripped off a pair of expensive fur-lined gloves, put them in his pocket, and lighted a cigar. "You want the truth, huh?"

"Yes," said Morton.

"Maybe I'm trustin' you with my life, see?"

"You can trust me or not, as you choose. There's no danger to you, because there are no witnesses to our conversation. Besides which, no lawyer who expected to continue in practice would betray a client's confidence. But make up your own mind, Bracco."

The gangster removed the cigar from his mouth; wet his thick lips with his tongue.

"Well, it was like this, he said huskily. "One night a coupla weeks ago me and a guy named Sailor Red —he's one of my mob—we went into this cigar store about nine P.M. to buy a package of cigarettes."

"Just to buy cigarettes, eh?"

"That's right, Mr. Morton. That's straight. We didn't have no other idea in our heads. Then when we got in the store, this guy Sailor Red he sees there ain't nobody in the place but the clerk. So, before I can figure his move, he pulls out his heatin' iron and tells the clerk to hand over his cash. Well, the clerk —this fella Pendexter that got killed —he says he'll have to open the cash register. So he turns around to do it, and Red looks at me and winks. But right at that second I see the clerk reach for his pocket, so I flash my rod and let him have it in the back. It all happens in a coupla seconds."

"I see. What then?"

"Why, then we just walked outa the store and went home."

"And nobody saw you go out? Nobody heard the shot?"

Bracco shrugged his bulging shoulders.

"Plenty of people musta saw us —after we got outside. The street was crowded. But nobody paid any attention to us and if anybody heard the shot they musta thought it was a car back-firin'. It was more'n an hour before a cop found the body behind the counter."

"The newspapers were right, then," said Morton evenly, without

emotion. "It was cold-blooded murder. But, as I've already pointed out, the lack of a motive is in your favor. What about this accomplice of yours, this Sailor Red?"

Bracco's lips twisted in an evil grimace.

"He got his in a crap game, in some joint down by the railroad yards, a week ago."

"He's dead?"

"Yeah."

"Your handiwork, Bracco?"

"Naw. I don't even know who stuck the knife in his ribs. I wouldn't depend on a knife, myself."

"I believe you," said Morton, and added thoughtfully: "That simplifies matters. But why should the police suspect you of the Pendexter killing?"

The gangster's voice was a snarl: "I'm suspected of everything that goes screwy in this town. If a millionaire gets snatched or a kid gets lost walkin' home from school, some flat-foot from headquarters starts tailin' me. I'm sick of it, see? I can't stand no more of it—"

"You think the police have no real evidence against you?"

"Naw! But what's a cop care about evidence if he's got a piece of rubber hose in his hand? I'm out on bail now, but that won't keep the dicks from crackin' down on me. see? That's where you come in, Mr. Morton. You gotta get me outa town, or sumpin, till I gotta go to court. I can't stand no third-degree stuff—"

"Steady, Bracco," Morton said sharply. "Keep your shirt on. I can protect you from the police easily enough—*if* I decide to defend you at all."

Bracco half rose from his chair.

"What?" he gasped. "What'd you say? You mean you ain't sure you'll take the case, after I come here—"

"It all depends—"

"—here and told you I killed a guy? Why, damn you—"

"Sit down," Morton said, so quietly that the other, after a moment, sank back into the chair. "Now. I've already told you that your confession is safe with me. Even if I wanted to betray you, no court would take my unsupported testimony as evidence."

"Then what's the idea, huh?"

"It's this," Morton said, and paused long enough to create in Bracco a tension of acute interest. "Before I decide finally whether or not to become your lawyer, I want to make absolutely sure of two things."

"What are they?"

"I want to be sure of your nerve, and of your confidence in me."

"I got plenty of nerve," blustered Bracco.

The lawyer looked at him. "Yes; you've got the nerve to shoot a helpless man in the back. But have you got the kind of nerve you'll need on the witness stand—with a jury watching every move you make and every expression on your face? I can build a defense for you, Brac-

co. I can coach you in the lies you'll have to tell. But have you got the guts to follow where I lead you? Above all, will you—at all times and without reservation — really trust me? Trust me with your life?"

A muscle twitched in the gangster's dark face.

"Say! Would I be sittin' here in your office if I didn't trust you?"

"You've got to prove it to me," Morton said in his quiet voice. "I can't afford to take the slightest chance of losing my reputation in this community. It's my life as well as yours. You've got to prove your confidence in me."

"Prove it—how?"

Gail stretched a long arm across the desk.

"Give me your gun."

"I ain't— How do you know—"

"Hand it over, Bracco."

The killer reached under his left armpit and drew out a thirty-eight caliber revolver, which he placed in Gail Morton's hands.

"What's the game?" asked Bracco, scowling.

Morton didn't answer. Now he had the revolver out of sight under the desk. He was doing something with it. The mysterious movement of his hands under the desk sent muscular ripples up his arms and into his drooping shoulders. Finally he thrust his left hand into his overcoat pocket. With his right hand he pushed the cocked revolver back across the desk toward Bracco.

"I want you," he said, "to put the muzzle of this gun against your temple and pull the trigger."

"You want—*what*?"

"You heard me, didn't you?"

"Say, lissen, you! What's the gag? D'you think I'm nuts?"

"Listen yourself, Bracco. I've taken all the cartridges out of that gun. It's empty."

"How do I know it's empty?"

Morton thrust his huge torso halfway across the desk. His ugly face gleamed like marble in the lamplight.

"You *don't* know, Bracco! That's just the point. You've got to take my word for it. Before I accept your case you've got to prove to me that you're willing to *trust me with your life!*"

The gangster's swarthy skin turned swiftly to parchment; his black eyes stared wildly out of a mottled, repulsive, yellowish face.

"What the hell!" he shrieked faintly. "What the hell!"

"Do what I say!" roared Gail Morton in a voice whose thunders had shaken many a courtroom. "Do what I say—or walk out of this office straight to the electric chair!"

Bracco made a sound—an inarticulate animal sound, deep in his throat. Then, as if hypnotized, he slowly raised the revolver (it seemed a great weight in his hand) and placed the muzzle against his right temple. His eyes grew enormous as they stared into Morton's.

"O. K., smart guy! I'm trustin' you, see? I'm trustin' y—"

The shot shattered with crazy echoes the silence of the room. Bracco's body leaped convulsively off the chair, struck the floor with a soft crashing sound, and lay still.

Gail Morton acted quickly then. In an instant he was bending over the gangster's crumpled form. Bracco was dead. Picking up the revolver that lay on the floor nearby, Morton took from his pocket the five cartridges that he had removed from it and, breaking the gun, replaced them in the chamber. The empty shell of the sixth cartridge, which he had *not* removed, remained where it was.

Carefully replacing the revolver on the floor, near the dead man's outstretched hand, Morton rose and went to the clothes closet near the fireplace. He took off his hat and overcoat and hung them in the closet. He removed his yellow pigskin gloves and stuffed them into his overcoat.

He strode back to his desk and phoned police headquarters. Then he sat down, lighted a cigar, and waited.

In a remarkably short time two patrolmen, a coroner's assistant, and a detective sergeant arrived at his office. Morton met them at the door. They all knew lawyer Morton.

"Evenin', sir," said the sergeant. "What's happened?"

Gail pointed to the corpse on his carpet. He said quickly, "That is—or was—Johnny Bracco, sergeant."

"Bracco! You mean Bracco the gangster?"

"Yes. He came here tonight to try to engage me as his attorney. He confessed to the Pendexter killing and—"

"Johnny confessed he done the Pendexter job?"

"Yes. He wanted me to defend him. He felt that he was in grave danger."

"He was right," said the police officer grimly. "But—go on, Mr. Morton. What's the pay-off on this story?"

"It's very simple, sergeant. Bracco was desperate—frightened out of his wits and yellow to the backbone. When I refused to have anything to do with the case, he went all to pieces.

"I ordered him to leave my office. Suddenly he pulled out his

gun and shot himself. Temporary insanity, I suppose."

"That tough gangster killed himself?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll be a son of a gun." said the sergeant softly. He looked at Gail Morton. "Knowing Johnny, it's a wonder he didn't shoot *you*."

"He lacked the nerve, sergeant. You see, I didn't turn my back to him, I kept looking him straight in the eye,"

The sergeant nodded understandingly. "Yeah," he said, and added with dispassionate final judgment: "The rat!" . . .

Once more alone in his office Gail Morton went to his desk and took from its top drawer the newspaper clipping that he had concealed there before Bracco came in. He walked to the fireplace; stood looking down at the picture of the woman whose faded prettiness still aroused repercussions of beauty in his brain.

Mechanically he murmured to himself the bleak words printed above it: *"Mrs. George Pendexter, Whose Husband Was Killed—"*

Gail Morton's ugly face took on a light other than that from the glowing grate.

"You'd have done better to have married me, my dear," he said aloud. "But you loved Pendexter, and that was that. At least I've avenged his death this night.

"A small service, but eminently satisfactory. Adroit, too. Very adroit, if I may say so. Good-by, my only dear, and may the Lord of all our twisted fates be kind to you."

Gail Morton threw the clipping into the fire.

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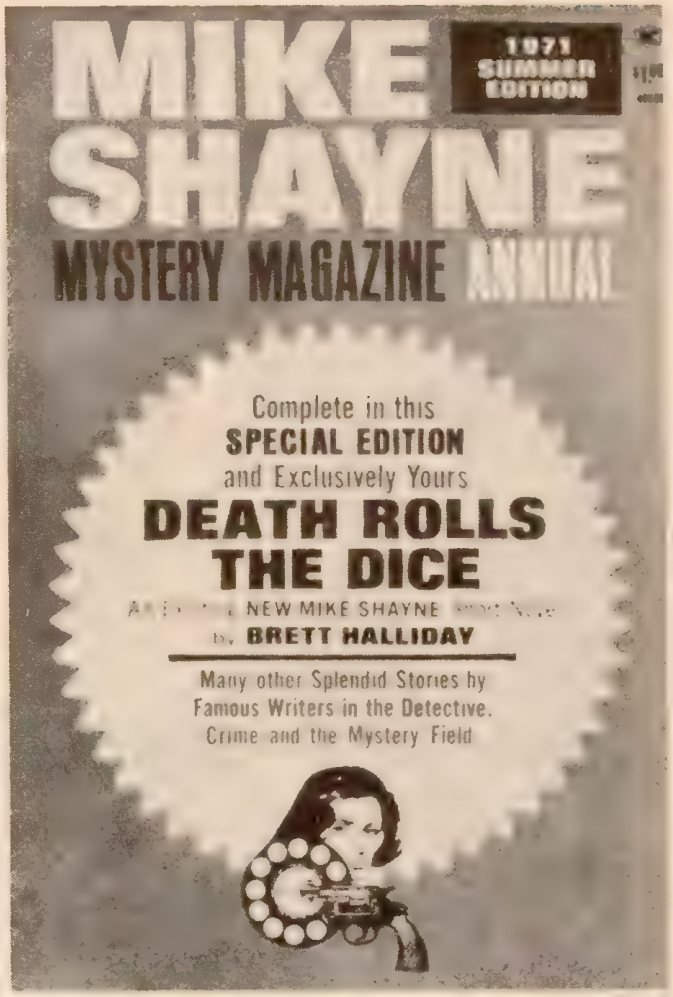
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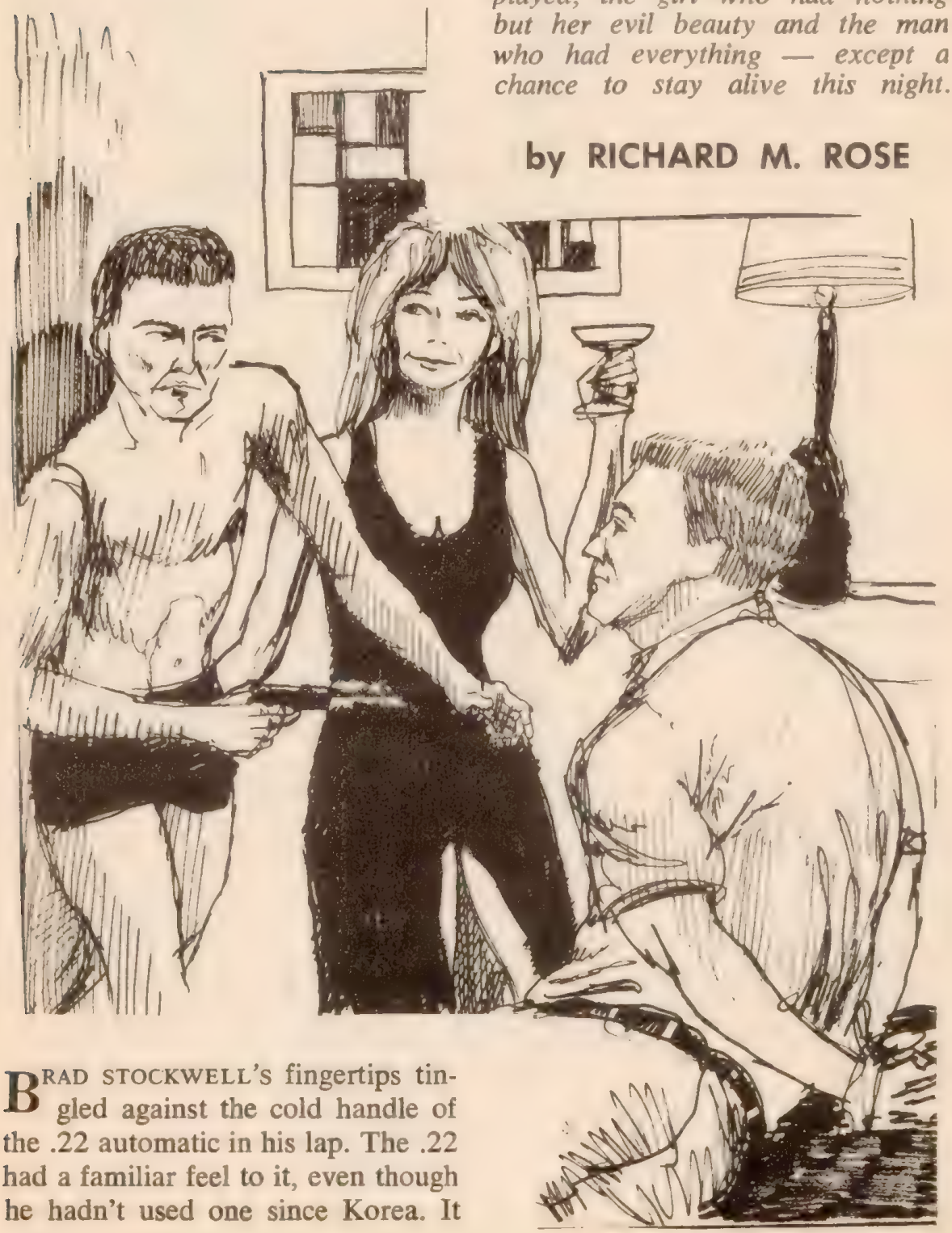
THE HARD CURE

Dark, deadly was the game they played, the girl who had nothing but her evil beauty and the man who had everything — except a chance to stay alive this night.

by RICHARD M. ROSE



BRAD STOCKWELL'S fingertips tingled against the cold handle of the .22 automatic in his lap. The .22 had a familiar feel to it, even though he hadn't used one since Korea. It

was almost like shaking hands with an old friend. And his friend would serve him well tonight.

Stockwell lowered the binoculars, and the figure on the beach below shrank into a bronze speck on a glare of sand. But even at that distance, before he'd confirmed it with the binoculars, he was sure that speck was Gloria.

She'd made it easier for him to find her this time. Once he'd known it was Carmel, he had only to check the tourist accommodations, concentrating on the out-of-the-way rentals. The expensive ones.

The Oceanside Cabanas were both private and expensive. The eight prim white structures, Spanish styled, with tiled patios, stretched out along an isolated beach about five miles from Carmel. Yes, just the kind of place she'd choose for her latest affair, Stockwell thought bitterly. Her latest and last!

As he watched from the front seat of his '70 Thunderbird, parked just off the asphalt road winding along the edge of the steep bluff, the bronze speck below began to move toward the bungalow at the extreme right.

Stockwell raised the binoculars again, and the image of Gloria, his wife, jumped sharply into focus. He watched her glide across the sand, her exquisite body accentuated by a bright turquoise bikini about the size of a G-string. The sight took the wind out of him like a fist in the stomach.

She still had that impact, even after ten long years of her. Her hips were fuller now, the pert breasts not quite so firm, the blonde hair coarser. But the girlish waist, the long model's legs, the lovely oval face with its full sensuous mouth and luminous green eyes seemed to have survived the years unaltered by time.

Brad Stockwell's breath came shudderingly as he watched her and wondered what kind of man she'd picked this time—if he'd know him. He doubted it. Gloria had tired of the local country club studs long ago. But no one was following her to the cabana. Stockwell panned the beach with the binoculars. A few people lingered in deck chairs, soaking up the waning sunshine as the blue-green waters of the Pacific slashed noisily at the shore.

Probably in the cabana, Stockwell thought, lowering the binoculars. Or maybe he hadn't shown yet. He hoped that was it. He had nothing against the man. There had been too many men. You couldn't hate them all.

Brad Stockwell lit up a cigarette from the dash lighter and leaned back to watch the sun make its spectacular descent into the sea. The cigarette had no taste. He felt completely dead inside. The last bullet in the .22 would only make it official.

It hadn't always been that way. Not even during those hellish days in Korea, where a combat engineer was open season for Gook snipers.

He'd had the dream to sustain him through them. Stockwell & Company, engineers extraordinary. Build a bridge or blast a tunnel anywhere. Africa, South America, the challenging places. That was for him.

For him, but not for Gloria. Not for a girl whose idea of roughing it was traveling tourist. So the dream had to go. And in its place, the plush house in Burbank, the country club, the cottage at Tahoe, and Gloria. All of which cost money, lots of it, especially Gloria. But the money came easy. As easy as throwing up a shopping center or housing development.

A far cry from the dream, but he could take it as long as he had Gloria.

That was the joker. He hadn't had her very long. And yet he couldn't let go. She was his sickness and there was no cure. Not until now. He'd finally found the answer. The final medication to all the years of pain and humiliation.

Stockwell stabbed out the cigarette in the ash tray. It was time. Darkness had descended like a black shroud, wrapping itself around him. The proper mantle for what he had to do.

First he had to know if she was alone. He got out of the car and walked along the crest of the bluff to the carport that belonged to Gloria's cabana. The Ford Fairlane in the carport looked like a rental. The door was unlocked.

Stockwell found the rental papers inside the glove compartment, made out in Gloria's name. He found something else too. On the floor, a crumpled cigarette pack. The brand was strong, unfiltered, not like the mild cigarettes Gloria smoked. A man's brand. His question was answered.

He started cautiously down the steps to the beach. Lights spilled from most of the bungalows below. A mixture of laughter and music drifted toward him with the slight breeze carrying the dank fragrance of the ocean. Someone having a party, he thought. But no one in sight. Good.

He reached the beach. Sand got into his shoes as he waded toward Gloria's bungalow.

It looked completely dark. Stockwell stopped a few yards away and listened. There were no sounds but the rhythmic roll and slap of the surf minging with the tinkle of music and laughter.

He hoped they wouldn't be making love when he found them, that he'd be spared that final humiliation. The screen door at the back complained slightly as he eased it open. He was relieved to find the inner door was open. Now that he'd come this far, he wanted to get it over with as quickly as possible.

Inside he paused to let his eyes adjust to the blackness. There was no sound except the whisper of his own cautious breathing. Gradually, the forms of an ice box and stove took shape in the darkness. An even

blacker opening to the right showed him the way to the living room. He started through it, feeling his way as if he were walking barefoot on broken glass. His palms were sweaty now, the gun hot in his grip.

He stopped, his heart pounding wildly. He'd remembered how it had been in Korea—the prisoners the Gooks left behind, on their knees as if in prayer, their brains splattered all over the ground.

The gun was like a hot poker in his hand now. He must be crazy to think he could kill like that, like the Gooks. No, only one bullet in the gun would be necessary. The one reserved for himself.

He started to raise the gun, turning it toward his temple, when he saw it! There in the darkness, a dull tip of light. He watched it float up, glowing brighter. A face began to materialize. Gloria's face, eerily illuminated, suspended in blackness.

Maybe he *was* crazy. Then he saw the cigarette between the smiling lips. And her voice, soft and mocking.

"Hello, darling. We've been waiting for you."

Something hard jammed painfully against the base of Stockwell's spine. Another voice, a man's, said, "Easy, Stockwell! Just drop the gun and this thing won't go off."

Stockwell did as he was told, blinking in the sudden flare of light from the table lamp. Gloria was curled up in the arm chair next to the lamp, her long model's legs protruding from a turquoise shift. Her sensuous mouth was smiling its usual mocking smile.

"Darling, how nice of you to drop in."

"Hello, Gloria," Brad Stockwell said thickly.

"Get his gun, baby," the man behind him said. "Keep him covered while I tie him up."

Gloria uncurled herself from the chair and picked up the .22 at Brad's feet.

Her gun. He'd bought it for her when they were first married. He watched her thumb off the safety with a long polished nail, the way he'd taught her, and level the gun at his stomach. The pressure left his spine. A moment later his arms were jerked painfully behind his back, and something that felt like soft cloth was being wrapped tightly around his wrists.

"That won't be necessary," Stockwell said. "I'm over the revenge obsession."

The voice behind him snarled a reply.

"Okay. On the couch, Stockwell!"

Stockwell felt a hand shove him roughly toward the long beige couch. He was surprised by the sudden flash of anger that surged through him. He spun around to confront the man, Gloria's latest lover.

Stockwell's jaw dropped. That he didn't know the man was no surprise. What threw him was the man's general resemblance to himself. About the same medium height and

build, with thick arms and calves, a taunt face a little too rugged to be called handsome, even the greying crew cut. Except the man's face was younger, and his body, clad only in black skin-tight swim trunks, looked hard where his had gone soft.

The man put out a big hairy hand against his chest and pushed him down onto the couch. A moment later Brad Stockwell was staring into the barrel of an ugly looking Luger.

"Oh, my, where are my manners?" Gloria said, with a little theatrical pout of self reproach. "Darling, meet Stanley Teal. Stanley, my husband." She said husband as if it were a dirty word.

Teal's deeply tanned face was split by a shark-like smile that exposed two rows of flashing white teeth.

"We didn't expect you to come with a gun, Stockwell. Lucky thing Gloria spotted your car up there on the bluff."

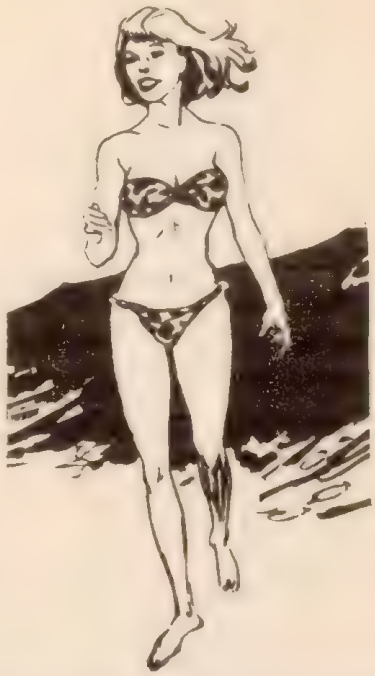
Brad Stockwell didn't understand. They'd expected him. How could they? And why?

"Yes, that was terribly melodramatic of you, darling," his wife said, flourishing the .22. "Were you really going to use this?"

"That was the idea."

"Well, I'm impressed, darling," Gloria said in that mocking tone that went with the smile. "I thought you'd come crawling, begging me to come back, like the other times."

"No more crawling," Stockwell said, the old hurt creeping into his



stomach. "No more anything. Just give me five minutes alone. With the gun."

Gloria studied him a moment, then grimaced skeptically. "Suicide? Oh, come on, darling. If we could believe that we wouldn't have to kill you, would we?"

It took several seconds for the words to register. Several more for Brad Stockwell to believe them. But as he stared at her, saw the flush of excitement in her cheeks, he knew it was true.

"So you finally seduced somebody into murdering for you."

Teal's teeth flashed. "The only way, Stockwell. Gloria knew you'd never give her a divorce."

Stockwell looked hard at Teal. In the old days, when he was bulldozing roads out of Central American jungle, he could have taken Teal. Maybe he still could.

"Where did you find this one, Gloria? Doing push-ups at the Y?"

Teal's eyes narrowed. Colorless eyes, like dried ice. "Don't make it hard on yourself, Stockwell. I can hurt you bad first, if that's the way you want it."

"No!" Gloria's voice snapped. Then, more calmly, "We can't take a chance, lover. It has to look like an accident."

Brad Stockwell forced a stiff grin. "Accident, eh? Better make it look good, Gloria. With your track record with men, the police will take a very long, hard look at a dead husband."

"It will look good, darling husband," Gloria said, smirking confidently. "We've planned everything, you see. And the first thing we had to do was get you here, where people don't know us."

"I see," Brad said. "I thought that tourist pamphlet of Carmel on your dresser drawer was a little too convenient."

"But you still took the bait, didn't you? Came running right to mama. Of course, we didn't expect you to come with a gun, but it worked anyway."

"Kind of a roundabout way of setting me up," Brad Stockwell said. "Why didn't you just ask me?"

Gloria laughed as if the idea was absurd. "I'm sorry, darling, but I really think I could have been convincing. I've grown too fond of hating you. Besides, a sudden change of heart might have made you suspicious."

It might have at that, Stockwell admitted to himself. This way he'd walked right into it like a hick into a carnival sideshow.

"You see, this whole thing depends on people believing we've reconciled," Gloria explained, laying the gun on the table. She removed a cigarette from a silver case and clicked a lighter. "Second honeymoon and all. I've already told a few of our so-called friends in Burbank."

"Second honeymoon. Maybe some people will wonder why we didn't come here together."

"Why, darling, don't you remember?" Gloria said, smoking extravagantly. "You had some business to clean up before you could join me."

"Well, now that I've joined you, what happens? Don't tell me you planned to have me accidentally shoot myself."

Gloria laughed her mocking laugh. "Nothing so crude, darling. It's really perfectly simple. Stanley has kept out of sight until now. Tomorrow he becomes you. People will see us laughing and cuddling fondly on the beach. They'll think, my, what a happy couple!"

Stockwell felt the anger stirring in him again. Gloria was getting such a damned kick out of this. He blurted a harsh laugh, saying, "Do you really think Stanley here can pass for me?"

"Of course. Stanley's about your height and build. The crew cut and a little touch of grey in his hair was enough to make him a suitable dou-

ble. Remember, these people don't know you, darling. Stanley only has to look enough like you for no one to get suspicious later."

As Gloria talked, the whole thing began to fall into shape for Stockwell. He already knew the answer, but he asked the question anyway.

"And where will I be all this time?"

"You'll be dead, Stockwell!"

Stockwell had almost forgotten Stanley Teal was in the room. Now as he looked at the hard colorless eyes and the shark smile, he knew Gloria had picked well. Stanley Teal would kill for her.

Gloria rose from the chair. "Tell him how it will be, lover. I'm going to mix myself a martini. Join me?"

Later, baby. After it's over."

Brad Stockwell saw Stanley Teal's eyes follow Gloria hungrily as she went into the kitchen. If his hands had been free, he'd have jumped Teal then. He wanted to put a fist through that shark smile. He tried to twist his wrists to loosen the cloth, but it was no use. It would take time to work those bonds loose. And the Luger in Teal's hand said time was running out.

Hoarsely, he said, "Yes, tell me, Stanley. Tell me how you're going to commit the perfect murder."

"Not murder, Stockwell. An accident, remember. You get a cramp and drown. With witnesses. That's the beauty of it. But you go tonight. Can't take any chances of your getting loose."

"I hope I don't embarrass you by washing up too early."

Teal chuckled deep in his throat. "No way, Stockwell. Here's how it happens. We give you a shot to knock you out. We put a bathing suit on you, like the one I'm wearing. Then along about one or two, when everything's quiet, I take you out in my rubber life raft. Way out, about half a mile. Then I drown you.

"You'll be just conscious enough to get water in your lungs. I untie your hands. You'll notice I used a silk cloth so as not to leave marks. I use another piece of cloth to tie your feet to a hundred-pound weight, but this cloth has been chemically treated to decompose in about seventy-two hours. Get the picture?"

Brad Stockwell got the picture all too clearly. He would not wash up early. And when he did, his body would be so bloated and disfigured that no one would doubt he wasn't the same man they'd seen on the beach with Gloria.

Now Brad felt the anger swelling inside him like a living thing. But it was too late for anger, too late for anything. Teal had tucked the barrel of the Luger into his trunks and was taking something out of the table drawer. A small case the size of a jewelry case. He opened it and removed a hypodermic syringe.

"You said there would be witnesses," Brad Stockwell said, his brain spinning. Damned if he was going to let them just wrap him up and throw him away like so much

garbage! But all he could do was stall, try to figure a way out. "Do you really think you can fake a drowning?"

"Stanley's an expert swimmer, darling," Gloria said, as she returned from the kitchen with the familiar martini. "He'll make it look good."

"Better than good," Teal added. He carefully filled the hypo from a plastic ampoule. "I've got a tank with fifty pounds of air. I'll sink it about a hundred yards off shore tonight. Tomorrow, I'll simply swim around until I find it. Then I'll go into my drowning act."

"And no one will see him come up," Gloria said, easing into the armchair. She popped an olive between her mocking lips and gnawed on the pit. "He'll swim under water for about a mile. We've got a suitcase hidden there with clothes and money. Later, after it's dark, he'll walk into Carmel and catch a bus for the airport. Simple, isn't it, darling?"

Yes, very simple, Stockwell thought bitterly. For the first time he began to think they could get away with it.

Stanley Teal had finished filling the hypo. He tested it, squirting a drop into the air, his shark smile stretching.

"Now, Stockwell. A little something to give you a good night's sleep."

This is it, Stockwell thought. He could put up a struggle, but Teal would hold him down while Gloria gave him the shot. No good. His eyes swept the room, saw Gloria's face, her eyes glowing with excitement, the martini trembling in her hand. Then he spotted it . . . the .22 on the table next to her. One chance!

He threw back his head and forced the laughter, great choking gushes of laughter.

"Something funny, Stockwell?" Teal said, the smile souring.

"Yes. Something's funny!" Brad Stockwell gasped. "You, you poor son! You're funny!"

The white teeth clicked together. "You got a big mouth for a dead man, Stockwell."

Brad Stockwell choked out more laughter. "That's just it, Stanley. You shove that needle in me and you'll be as dead as me. Tell him, Gloria. Tell him about the money you'll get when you're a widow."

"I know about the money—" Teal began.

"Let's see, there's the hundred thousand in insurance. And the business. Well, she should be able to get at least half a million for that. Which leaves her a moderately wealthy widow, Stanley. But where does it leave you?"

"You don't get the picture, Stockwell. We're crazy about each other."

Brad Stockwell laughed again and felt his jaw rattled by the back of Teal's left hand. Good, he thought. Getting to you, Stanley.

"I've got news for you, sucker," he said. "She'll have her fill of you in six months. But you'll be easier

to get rid of than me. Because she'll have the money. She can buy your death as casually as she buys a new hat."

"Shut up!" This time it was Gloria who spoke, her face all twisted with hate.

Brad Stockwell ignored her, the words tumbling from his throbbing mouth like broken teeth. "Did you think your resembling me was a coincidence, Stanley? Don't you know you were hand-picked? She needed an expert swimmer, someone with my general height and build. Now tell me, Stanley. Tell me how this whole accidental drowning scene was your idea."

"You bastard!" Gloria shrieked. She was on her feet now, her lovely body as rigid as death.

Even Stanley Teal's face had lost some of its deep tan. "It looks like you want it the hard way, Stockwell!"

Stockwell watched the big hand raise and shrank back against the couch. He'd shaken Teal up enough to make him careless. He'd have one shot. Just one. It would have to be good.

As Stanley Teal stepped forward, his hand sweeping toward his face, Stocwell stabbed out with his right foot. He felt a wet spray of spittle as the toe of his shoe sank into Teal's groin, jarring the gun from his trunks. Teal dropped the hypo, and staggered like a drunk, his face sculptured in pain.

Brad Stockwell was off the sofa like a shot, hurtling his one hundred and seventy pounds at Gloria. He hit her with a shoulder block. The impact sent her spinning back like a paper doll caught in a draft. Her head made an ugy sound as it struck the oak paneled wall. She collapsed into a silent heap.

Brad Stockwell didn't look at her. He had only one thought now. The .22. He'd hoped the kick would put Teal out of commission long enough to work his hands loose. But Teal was a tough one. He'd sagged to his knees, clawing at his groin, his eyes glazed, uncomprehending.

But in a moment Stockwell knew he'd recover enough to pounce on him. Not enough time to get loose. But if he could get the .22 . . .

He backed against the table, his fingers feeling for the gun. Teal was already shaking his head, shoving himself groggily to his feet. Stockwell leaned back further, his fingers probing, probing. He knew Teal couldn't see the gun behind him and prayed he'd forgotten it was there. That might buy him a few more seconds.

But time had run out. Stanley Teal was on his feet now, his eyes blazing with hate. His voice rasped in a hoarse, deadly whisper, "I'm going to kill you, Stockwell! Slow, with my hands, where it won't show! Then, when you're begging me to end it, I'll feed you to the fish!"

Stockwell watched Stanley Teal's big hands flex, the thick fingers stretching, curling, stretching. Suddenly, he felt something cold and metallic. The .22! The fingers of his right hand fumbled at the handle. The gun made a slight scraping noise against the table. Stockwell saw Teal's eyes question the sound for a second.

It gave him the chance to grip the gun firmly and point it directly behind him. Then Teal's black eyebrows smashed together. A second later he was lunging at him, a terrible expression on his face.

But Stockwell was already turning, squeezing off the rounds as fast as possible as his body pivoted. By raking the target, he hoped one bullet would connect. The room seemed to erupt with sound that hammered cry between explosions, but a second at his ears. He thought he heard a later Teal's body smashed against his back, knocking the gun from his hand. Stockwell's head struck the edge of the table as he pitched face down on the floor.

He lay there for seconds—minutes—he didn't know. Waves of intense pain swirled inside his head, his vision blurred by a red mist. Slowly the mist parted and the pain in his head subsided into a steady throbbing. He made a feeble effort to move but it was no use. He could feel Teal's weight on top of him now, pinning him to the floor.

Okay, Stanley Teal, he thought dully. Your turn. Get it over. Had my try.

But nothing happened. The weight on top of him neither moved nor made a sound. Then Stockwell understood.

It was dead weight!

THE HEADLIGHTS OF the Thunderbird swept along the dual highway, colliding briefly against the sign that glowed out the words, "San Francisco, 60 Miles." Stockwell's foot eased on the accelerator and he watched the speedometer needle sink from ninety to seventy. He kept it at a steady seventy.

Some of the tension began to drain from his body for the first time since he'd left that cabin. It had only taken a few minutes to work his hands loose. Stanley Teal was finished. He'd caught two of the slugs, one in the chest, the other in the stomach. But Gloria was just unconscious. She lay crumpled against the wall like a discarded doll.

He'd knelt beside her, his fingers slipping around the neck. He could feel the jugular vein pulsing against his thumbs.

She deserved to die. But the anger in him was dead. So was something else. The hunger for her, the

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raw gut-aching hunger, stronger than pride, stronger than disgust. Dead! As he looked at her, the mocking lips curled back in an ugly smile, he felt like vomiting. And now he knew exactly what he had to do.

The hypo was undamaged. Using a handkerchief to avoid fingerprints, Stockwell released about half its contents and injected the rest into Gloria's thigh. That should keep her out for a while. He put the hypo back into the case and tucked it into his pocket.

Then he carried his wife over to where he'd fired the shots. Carefully he wiped his prints off the .22 and put it in her limp right hand. With his hand over hers, he forced her to squeeze off another round. The slug slapped into the opposite wall where some of the others had struck.

Brad Stockwell assumed nobody had heard the shots, or paid any attention to them, or the police would be all over the place by now.

Nonetheless, he scanned the rows of cabanas before he left. Most were dark. And he could detect no movement on the beach. As a final precaution, he smudged the door handle with his hand. It was the only other thing he could remember touching.

Gloria couldn't have planned it better, Brad Stockwell thought, his eyes fixed on the flowing white ribbon of cement. No one had seen him come or leave. Gloria would take the fall for Stanley Teal all by herself. A lovers' quarrel, that's how it would look. Manslaughter at worst, better than she deserved. A good lawyer might even convince a jury it was self-defense.

Brad Stockwell couldn't care less. He had other things to think about now. Liquidating the business, starting over again some place else. Africa, South America, maybe even India. He'd heard they needed engineers in India.

When the lights of San Francisco glittered at him in the distance, he was whistling, whistling like a kid. He hadn't done that for a very long time.

Hope, hate — all these things he had lost. But he still clung to one primeval urge—Murder!

I KNOW A WAY

by BILL PRONZINI

SUMMERVILLE Sheriff Mike Cameron finished locking the door after the last of the eleven drunks he and his deputy, Jack Hannigan, had arrested at *The Gandydancer*, a small roadhouse on the outskirts of town.

It was a lucky thing, he told himself wearily, turning deaf ears to the muttered protestations and demands from within the cell, that none of the eleven had suffered anything worse than a bloody nose. If they had, he and Hannigan would have had to make a special run to Kennerton, five miles distant, because that was where the closest hospital was located. As it was, they had had to make three trips to transport all of the eleven drunks between *The Gandydancer* and the jail.

As he followed the corridor back to the jail office, Cameron supposed it would have been easier to have forgotten the entire incident and sent the lot of them home. But damn it, he didn't like public brawling and it served them right if they had to cool their heels in a cell overnight. When old Judge Lee fined them each fifty dollars on Monday, maybe they'd think twice about getting into a ruckus again.

In the long run, that would make Cameron's job a hell of a lot simpler—and a hell of a lot happier, he thought ruefully.

He opened the block door and stepped into the office, closing the door quietly behind him. Hannigan was sitting at his desk with his feet propped on an opened drawer, massaging the back of his neck. Across the single room, Crazy Henry, the handyman, sat reading a comic book at one of the utility tables.

Cameron went to his desk, catty-corner to Hannigan's, and sat down heavily. He was a big, solid man with a deeply tanned, deeply lined face and piercing gray eyes.

He said, "Well, another jolly Saturday night."

"Yeah," Hannigan said. Thin and dark and normally good-humored, he had laugh wrinkles under his blue eyes and at the corners of a generous mouth. But he wasn't laughing now, or even smiling; he looked all in.

"You know, Mike," he said, "I get damned tired of this job sometimes. Seems the only thing it entails is pulling in weekend drunks or breaking up barroom brawls—or both, like tonight."

"Uh-huh," Cameron agreed laconically.

"Summerville is such a damned quiet town. Nothing ever happens here. We get maybe two felonies a year, if you want to call some kids stealing a car to go joyriding, or a transient breaking into Havemeyer's Grocery to raid the liquor felonies. The rest of the time, it's drunks. Damned lousy drunks, anyway."

"Well," Cameron said reasonably, "there's quite a few cops who would like to change places with us'.'

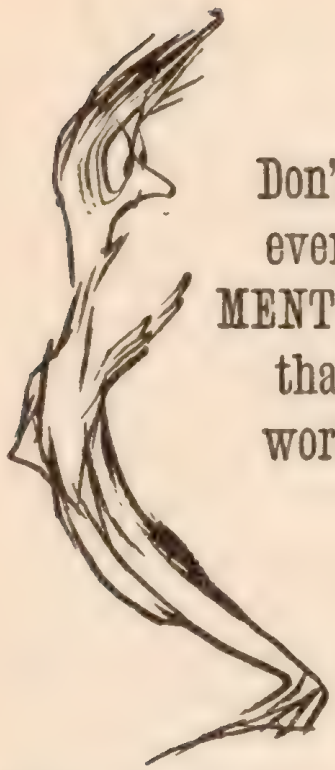
"Oh, I suppose," Hannigan said. "But hell, Mike, haven't you ever wished for something big to break? Something really big? Something to put Summerville on the map, get our names in the papers from coast to coast?"

"Like what?"

"Oh I don't know," Hannigan said. "Maybe a couple of escaped murderers holed up over at the Summerville Hotel, and we take 'em after a gun battle. Or the bank getting robbed. Something like that."

"I guess I wouldn't mind capturing some escaped murderers or some bank robbers," Cameron said wryly, "but you can leave out the gun battle, thank you."

"You know what I mean."



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"Sure, I know." Cameron sighed softly. "But things like that aren't going to happen. Nothing of national interest, or even state-wide interest, has happened in Summerville since the old man founded it in 1884. I don't imagine things are going to change for us."

"Well, I still wouldn't mind being famous."

"Neither would I," Cameron said. "But we might as well face it, Jack. We're just doomed to a life of anonymity, and that's that."

Both men were silent for a time, pondering. Crazy Henry said suddenly, "I know a way."

They looked at him. He was sitting in his chair, smiling at them, his wide blue eyes shining. He had been listening with rapt attention to their conversation. He was a tall, lanky man with a great moss-like tangle of brown hair and long, powerfully-muscled arms. He wore a blue denim shirt and a pair of faded, worn dungarees.

It was his job to sweep up every now and then, and do general odd-job chores around the jail. He wasn't officially on the city payroll, but Cameron gave him ten dollars a week for food and essentials. He slep on a cot in the woodshed out back.

"I know a way," he said again, his eyes flicking back and forth between Cameron and Hannigan.

"Well, that's fine, Henry," Cameron said gently.

"It's a real good way, too," Crazy Henry said.

"Sure it is."

"You been nice to me, Mike. Real nice. I want to do something for you and Jack. Something for Summerville, too."

"All right, Henry," Cameron

said. "Tell you what you can do. You can watch things here while Jack and me go over to Elsie's for some coffee. You run and fetch us if the phone rings."

"Okay, Mike."

"I'll bring you back some pie, how's that?"

"Blueberry?"

"Sure."

"That's my favorite."

"Mine, too."

Crazy Henry grinned and nodded. Cameron and Hannigan got on their feet and put their hats on. "Another hour, and Bert comes in to relieve, thank God," Cameron said, and they went out and shut the door behind them.

Crazy Henry stared at the door for a long moment. It's not a bad thing, he thought, because it'll be real good for Mike and Jack and Summerville. The television and the comic books say it's a bad thing no matter *what,* but they're wrong. It'll put Summerville on the map, and that's real good. It'll make Mike and Jack famous, and that's real good. Okay.

He nodded his head, his eyes shining brightly. He got to his feet and went out to the rear of the jail, to where the shed was located. He entered, and moments later came out again with the huge, double-edged woodsman's axe he used sometimes to chop small logs into cordwood. He went back into the jail.

The ring of keys was on Cameron's desk, where he'd put them, and Crazy Henry picked it up. He went to the block door and opened it.

"I know a way," he said, with a secret smile.

And with the keys in his left hand and the big sharp woodsman's axe in his right, Crazy Henry started down the corridor to the cell with the eleven drunks . . .

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Blood Money

Who was she, the shadowy lady of the evening, who found her love at last — to lure him to his death?

by EDWARD D. HOCH

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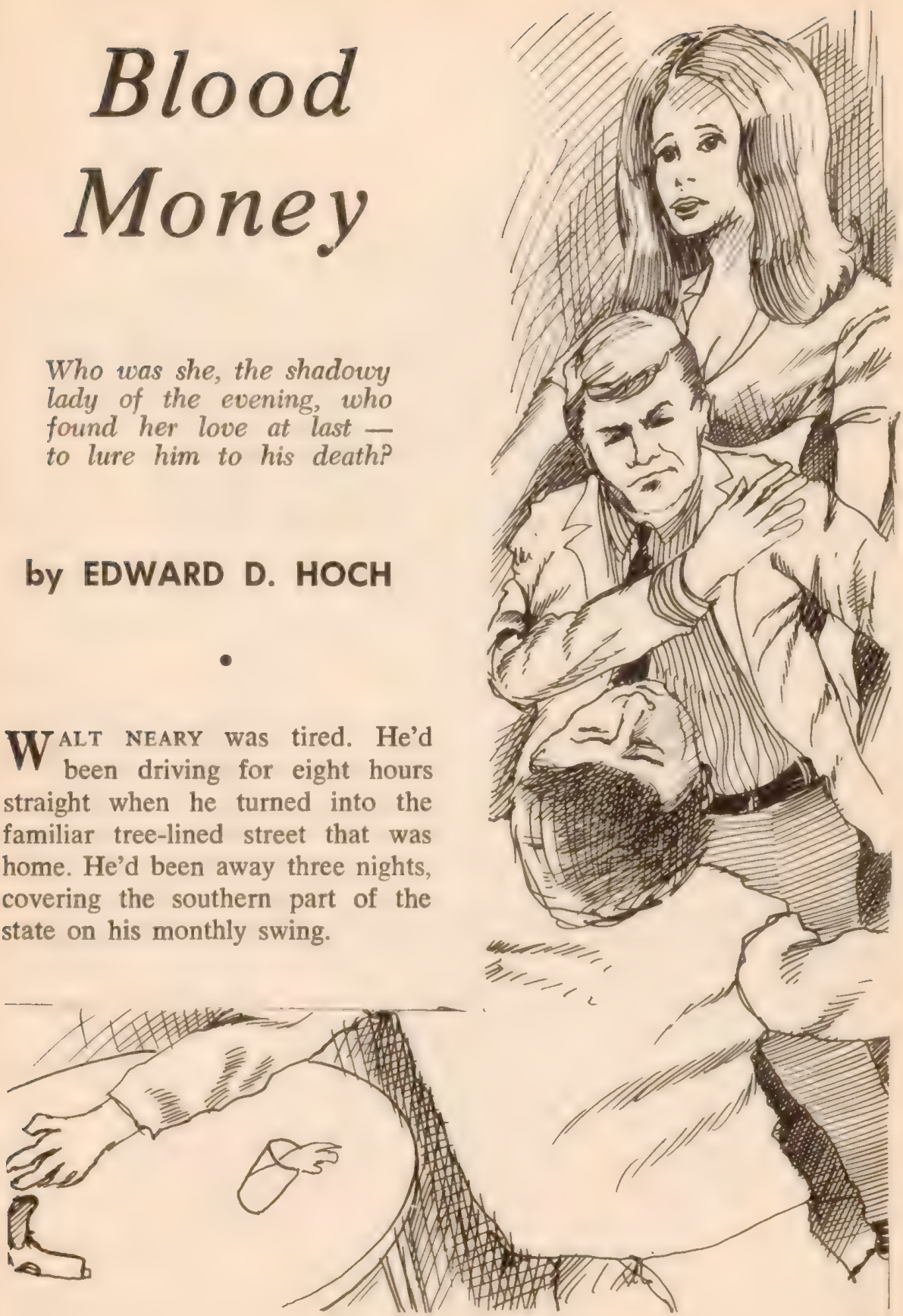


WALT NEARY was tired. He'd been driving for eight hours straight when he turned into the familiar tree-lined street that was home. He'd been away three nights, covering the southern part of the state on his monthly swing.

Usually he took a fourth night for the trip, breaking up the long drive home, but this time he'd come right through, anxious to be back home with Ellen.

Though it was after eleven, there was still a light in the living room of their little ranch home, and this was the first thing that struck him as odd. He knew Ellen usually liked to read in bed while he was away, curling up beneath the covers with the latest best seller.

Usually she turned out the front lights and went to the bedroom at ten-thirty, reading for an hour or so before sleep overcame her.

But this night it was different, and he swung into the driveway wondering why. Almost at once he had his answer. The front door and side door both faced the street, and now, with the sudden impact of a thunderclap, that side door by the garage was thrown open.

A man ran from the house, in almost the same instant that Ellen's scream split the night air.

Neary's first reaction was to go for the loaded revolver he always carried in his glove compartment. The running man was halfway across the front yard when Neary jumped from the car and raised the pistol, his wife's screams still echoing in his ears.

"Stop or I'll shoot!" he shouted.

The fleeing man paused, hesitated uncertainly, and then went down on one knee, pulling a snub-nosed automatic from beneath his coat. Walt Neary fired twice and the man toppled over on the grass.

Ellen was at the door then, screaming and sobbing. Her nightgown had been half torn from her body.

"My God, Walt, you've killed him!"

"I hope so. What happened?"

Neighbors were beginning to come from their houses now, and already in the distance Neary could hear the rising shrillness of a police siren. He led Ellen back into the house, and saw at once the overturned lamp and shattered vase.

"I was in bed, reading, and I heard a noise at the door," Ellen told him. "I thought it might be you, coming home a day early, so I got up and opened it to see. This man grabbed me and forced me inside. He said he wanted money. We struggled and overturned some things, and he ripped my nightgown. Just then you turned into the driveway. I don't know what would have happened if you hadn't arrived just then!"

"It's all right," he said, comforting her. "I did arrive. That's the important thing."

A police car had pulled up in front of the house, and he went out to meet them.

"What happened here?" one of the officers asked, and Neary told him, handing over the gun.

The other officer bent over the body on the lawn.

"This one's dead," he announced.

The circle of watching neighbors moved a bit closer at his words.

"I hope there won't be any trouble over this," Walt Neary said. "I fired in self-defense."

"One of the detectives will be here soon to question you," the first cop said. "Don't worry about it."

Ten minutes later, a detective named Bryant arrived with a photographer and an ambulance. He stood talking with the two cops by the body for a few moments, supervising the picture taking, and then went through the corpse's pockets. He rose to his feet, talked some more, and then came into the house.

As the body was taken away, the neighbors began to drift back to their houses.

"Suppose you tell me about it, Mr. Neary," Bryant began. "Do you always carry a gun in your car?"

Walt Neary cleared his throat. "I travel a lot. Sometimes I have valuable samples with me. The gun is registered. I have a license for it."

"Samples of what?"

Neary looked blank, and then understood the question. "Men's and women's wrist watches. I'm a salesman for National Time. On some trips I might have a thousand dollars or more in samples."

Bryant nodded absently, then listened while Ellen told her story.

"Well," he said at last, "I don't think there'll be any trouble over it. The man you killed is Tony Ancona, a petty crook with a record a mile long. He testified in a narcotics case a few months back, and he's been more or less in hiding since then. I'm sure nobody's going to shed any tears over him."

Walt Neary felt himself relax a little for the first time since he turned in the driveway. "That's good to know."

"In fact," the detective told him with a smile, "the newspapers will probably make you out to be something of a hero."

The next day, Walt Neary knew it was true. Reporters from both newspapers were at the house for interviews, and one local television station even sent a camera crew out for footage of Walt and Ellen Neary standing in the front yard at the spot where the shooting had occurred. For the next two days, he was something of a community celebrity.

Three nights later, as he was leaving work, a dark-haired young man walked up to him at his car.

"You're Walt Neary," the man said, making it a statement.

"Yes," Neary admitted. "What—"

"I have something for you." He reached into his coat and Neary froze in panic, imagining a silenced pistol that would gun him down right here in the company parking lot. But instead the young man produced a thick white envelope.

"What's this?" Neary asked, accepting the envelope. He opened the flap and saw it was filled with twenty-dollar bills.

"Two thousand dollars, Mr.

Neary. That was the price on Tony Ancona's head. You did the job, so you get the money."

"What? But I don't—"

The dark-haired man turned and walked quickly away, not looking back. Walt Neary was left holding the envelope of money. He stood there for several minutes, pondering what to do with it. Finally he stuffed it into his pocket and drove downtown to police headquarters.

Detective Bryant was in the squad room, taking a burglary complaint over the telephone. When he had finished, he glanced up and seemed surprised to see Neary standing there. "Well. What brings you down here, Mr. Neary?"

"I — I was wondering about that man I killed. I don't know, it's been bothering me, I guess. I want to know some more about him."

Bryant smiled indulgently. "Sure, have a seat." He passed the burglary report to another detective and leaned back in his chair. "Tony Ancona's been around town for maybe ten years. He had a petty arrest record, mostly gambling and narcotics violations, and he served two years on one charge."

"Was he married?"

"Divorced, I think. A long time ago. Lately he mostly lived with various women."

"What about this trial you mentioned?"

The detective shrugged his broad shoulders. "Fairly routine. We picked him up in a narcotics raid last spring, and promised him immunity from prosecution if he'd testify against his bosses in court. He did, and we convicted them. I understand some of the underworld goons were pretty upset about it. There was even word that they'd pay money for Tony's removal, as a sort of lesson to others. But Tony was smart. He stayed under cover, at least until the other night."

"Why do you think he tried to rob my house?"

Another shrug. "Probably needed money to get out of town. Maybe the pressure was getting too much for him here. Anyway, I wouldn't worry your head about it, Mr. Neary. If you hadn't killed him, some underworld goon probably would have, and that would be just more work for us."

"I see," Walt Neary said quietly. "Well, thanks very much."

He left the building with the two thousand dollars still in his coat pocket. He drove on home.

Ellen met him at the door, frowning with apprehension. "You're late," she said. "I was worried.' '

She hadn't really been relaxed since it happened, and he couldn't blame her. Already he'd promised to speak to his boss about traveling less frequently, though he hadn't quite gotten around to it yet.

"Oh, I just stopped by to talk with that detective, Bryant."

"Why? What for?"

"Nothing, nothing. Just thought I'd chat with him." She seemed on

the verge of hysterics, and it was hardly the time to mention the envelope with the money. "Calm down now. I'm home."

That evening, as he watched her preparing dinner and going about her usual chores, he thought a bit about the life that was passing them both by. Se was still a youthful-looking thirty-one, and he was only six years older. But they had never had children, never traveled, never really done much of anything except buy this little ranch home on a quiet suburban street where they rarely talked to the neighbors.

He thought about the things they could do with two thousand dollars, the places they could go. Europe, perhaps, or South America. She would like that.

Walt Neary had already decided against surrendering the money to the police. That would only raise awkward questions, and someone might even begin to think that he really had been paid to kill Tony Ancona. But keeping the money for his own use was another matter, and despite the attractions of a second honeymoon with Ellen in Europe, he couldn't quite bring himself to accept the envelope in his pocket. It was, after all, blood money.

He considered giving it to some charity, but could not decide which one. Even simply throwing the money away crossed his mind as a solution, but he was too frugal for that. No, there had to be another way. If only Tony Ancona had possessed a wife and family an easy solution would have presented itself. He would have given the money to them, anonymously, of course.

Ellen was already asleep in the big bed when he decided on a tentative plan of action. He would try to find one of the women Ancona had been living with lately, and determine if she needed the money. If she didn't, or if a brief quest was unsuccessful, he would think again about that trip to Europe with Ellen.

In the morning he told his boss he wasn't feeling well, and took the rest of the day off. The death notice in the newspaper had mentioned a brother, Mike Ancona, who had a florist shop across town. He seemed unconnected with the underworld, or with his brother's activities, and Neary figured it would be safe to approach him.

The florist shop was large and prosperous, a description that could also have fit Mike Ancona.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, studying Walt's face with a frown.

"I'm Walt Neary, the man who—who caused your brother's death."

Mike Ancona nodded. "I thought I recognized you from the pictures." Then he asked again, "What can I do for you?" His tone was neither hostile nor friendly. He might have been talking to a wall.

"I—I've been feeling bad about what happened. I was wondering if your brother had a family of any kind, anyone who might be suffering now that he's gone."

The florist snorted. "Maybe some of the whores and junkies around town are suffering, but no one else!"

"There was no woman he especially cared for?"

Mike Ancona sighed. "Really, I don't know what you're wasting your time for! He's dead and buried! You don't need to feel sorry."

"All right." Neary turned to leave.

"Wait a minute. Here's an address, over on the east side. A girl named Marge Morgan. He was living with her, last I knew. But that was before he testified and got in trouble with the mob."

"Thanks." He accepted the slip of paper.

"You don't need to feel sorry," Tony Ancona's brother said again as he left.

MARGE MORGAN worked as a cocktail waitress in a little downtown lounge, and it was there that Walt finally found her, wearing white hip-hugger pants and a short blouse that left her tanned midriff exposed.

"Sure," she told him immediately. "You look just like on TV. I watched you the other night."

Neary sipped a beer and said, "I understand from Tony's brother that he was living with you."

She tossed her blonde head. "That was six months ago. I hadn't seen him lately."

"Who had?"

"Why'd you want to know?"

Could he really explain it? "If there's someone suffering because of what I did, I'd like to help out. He had no family I could give money to, but perhaps a girl friend—"

"Mister, you can lay that money right here! I need it worse than she does!"

"She? Who's that?"

"The latest one. The last one, as it turned out. He met her right here in this joint too! I was watching the whole thing. A lonely gal looking for excitement, and she found him!"

"How long ago was that?"

"Just before the trial. After that, he laid low. I guess he knew there was a price on his head."

"What was the girl's name?"

She was suddenly sly. "Don't know her name."

"Does she still come in here?"

"No. Haven't seen her in months."

"Well, was Tony living with her?"

"No, nothing like that. He was

holed up somewhere, and he just went to see her when he could."

Walt Neary sighed and sipped his beer. It seemed to be a dead end. He watched Marge Morgan move away to wait on another table. Well, she didn't need the money, and it was doubtful if the other one did, either. Maybe this whole search had only been an effort at salving his own conscience. Maybe he really wanted to keep the two thousand dollars.

After a few moments Marge returned to his table. "What's it worth to you to find this girl?" she asked.

"Well, I hadn't . . ."

"A hundred bucks?"

"Do you know where she is?"

"I can reach her."

"I thought you didn't know her name."

"I just remembered it."

He thought about that. "Can you call her?"

"Sure."

"All right. Let me listen to the call and then I'll give you the hundred dollars."

She led the way to a pay phone in an alcove off the lounge, and looked up a number in the book, careful not to let him see it. Then she dialed the number.

"Hello, honey? You don't know me, but this is Marge, one of the waitresses at the Sunnyside Lounge. Look, honey, I've got something important to tell you about. I know you were Tony Ancona's girl before he got killed. I saw him pick you up in here one night last spring. He told me he was seeing you — What? No, no, I don't want no money. I just want to see you down here. You can't?" She covered the mouthpiece and turned to Walt. "She can't come today. Her husband's due home."

"Then give me her address."

"No." She turned back to the phone. "Honey, could you come here tomorrow? During the day? Fine. That will be fine. Three o'clock." She hung up.

"She's coming?"

"Tomorrow at three. Where's my money?"

Walt Neary took out the envelope and counted five twenty-dollar bills. "Here. I hope you're telling the truth."

Marge Morgan took the money and smiled. "You just be here at three tomorrow afternoon, Mr. Neary."

Walt Neary was just parking his car in his driveway when the dark-haired young man appeared at his side window. He'd obviously been waiting nearby, watching for his return home.

"What now?" Neary asked, wondering if he could reach the pistol in the glove compartment if he had to. "Another envelope for me?"

The man leaned on the car door, his face very close to Walt's. "You been asking questions. You went to see Tony's brother today. What for?"

"Nothing that concerns you."

"We paid you for killing Tony. It concerns us."

"Look, I didn't ask to be paid! I don't even want your damned blood money! I didn't kill Ancona for you!"

The young man leaned closer. "Why did you go see Tony's brother?" he asked again.

"I was trying to find out if he had any family, anyone close that I could help. I feel some responsibility, after all!"

The man nodded. "All right. Just keep your nose clean, Mr. Neary."

He faded back into the shadows, and for some minutes Neary sat gripping the steering wheel. Did he really fear the dark-haired young man that much? Why hadn't he flung the money back in his face and been done with it? What was he doing now, arranging to meet some woman he didn't even know and bestow upon her a gift of two thousand dollars? Nineteen hundred, he corrected mentally, subtracting the hundred he'd already paid to Marge Morgan.

Presently he went into the house and found Ellen waiting for him. She seemed hardly less nervous than he did.

"What is it, Walt?" she asked. "You're so white!"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. How was your day?"

"Fine." Her hands were twisting a handkerchief. "Walt, I think we both need to get away. After what happened the other night, I think it would do us both good."

"You're right, I suppose," he said.

"Could we, Walt? Could we go away tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow? Well, that's a bit soon for me. I'd have to clear it with my boss and all."

"Walt, I've never asked you anything, have I? I've never complained about all those nights you were on the road, away from home."

"No," he admitted.

"Then please, can't we go away tomorrow?"

He sighed and patted the envelope in his pocket. "Let me talk to the boss in the morning. I've got an afternoon appointment but maybe we can get away tomorrow night."

Later, while she was getting ready for bed, he counted out the remaining money into two bundles. A thousand dollars would be enough for Tony Ancona's mysterious girl friend. The other nine hundred could take him and Ellen away for two weeks' needed vacation. After all, he'd earned that much.

Shortly before noon the next day Detective Bryant phoned Neary at his office. He was getting his desk in order for the vacation trip the sales manager had approved.

"How are you today, Mr. Neary?" he asked.

"Oh, fine. Is anything wrong?"

"No, not a thing. But I just thought you'd be interested in

knowing we've arrested Ancona's brother, a florist here in town."

"What—what for?"

"Seems he was tied in with this whole narcotics ring. We think he might have even put up some money for his own brother's killing. But he's behind bars now."

"I'm glad to hear that."

Walt Neary found that he was sweating, though he didn't know why. "Look, the wife and I are going away for a week or two. The excitement's been a bit too much for us both."

"Good idea," Bryant told him. "Wish I could do the same."

Neary finished straightening his desk and left the office at noon. He knew he should go home to Ellen and forget his three o'clock appointment at the Sunnyside Lounge, but it was a loose end he couldn't leave dangling. Certainly the girl Marge Morgan had spoken to on the phone was not responsible for anything that had happened. She deserved a little of the blood money that had come from Tony Ancona's killing.

He killed a couple of hours time until it was getting near three o'clock. Then he drove downtown and parked next to the Sunnyside Lounge. Marge was inside, serving drinks to the scattering of customers.

"Hi, there," she greeted him. "Back again?"

"To meet this girl. You're sure she'll show at three?"

"She'll show, because she's scared what I'll do if she doesn't."

"How'd you find out who she was?"

Marge looked away, wiping the wet from a table. "I saw her picture somewhere, and it gave her name. I said to myself, now that's the girl Tony picked up in here."

"But how'd you know she was still seeing him?" Neary asked, but Marge had already moved off to serve another customer. He glanced at his watch and saw that it was five minutes to three.

The street door opened and Walt Neary tensed himself. But it was not a girl. It was the dark-haired man who'd given him the envelope. Neary turned his head and hoped he wouldn't be seen, but it was no good. The man had followed him here, of course, or else recognized his car.

"Neary" he said, coming closer. "What in hell did you do?"

"I — I don't know what you mean."

"You turned in Mike to the cops, didn't you?"

"No. I didn't know anything about it. I thought he was just a florist. I thought—"

"You're done thinking," the young man said. His hand came out of his jacket, holding a gun.

"Look, take back your money! I never wanted it. Take it back!"

"It's too late for that, Neary!"

The gun was coming up fast when Marge hurled her tray of drinks at the young man. It spoiled his aim, and he had only an instant for a

quick shot at her before Neary was on top of him, beating him to the floor. He hit him once, twice, three times, before someone was pulling him off, before a policeman was handcuffing the dark-haired man.

They helped Neary to his feet and he looked around, and the first person he saw was Ellen, standing in the doorway. "My God, Ellen, what are you doing here?"

Her face was as white as the tablecloths, and she clung to the door frame for support. She was in near collapse. After a few moments of hesitation, she managed to say, "I — I was shopping and thought I'd stop in for a drink. What happened here?"

"Never mind that. Never mind anything. Let's get out of here." But then he remembered Marge Morgan and walked over to where she sat bleeding on the floor. Another waitress was trying to bandage her arm. "Are you all right?"

She looked up at him and smiled. "Hell, yes. He only nicked me with that shot."

"I guess you saved my life."

"I guess you saved mine too." She glanced over to where Ellen stood. "Why don't you take your wife and get out of here? I'll answer their questions. Take her and go, and tell her there's nothing to worry about."

"Sure," Walt Neary told her. He straightened up and went back over to Ellen. He was walking slower now, as if the air was very heavy.

"What about it, Walt?" Ellen asked. "Can we still get away?"

He looked over at Marge, and at the handcuffed young man, and then at his wife.

"Sure," he said at last. "Sure we can. I'll just talk to the cops and tell them how it was. And then we can go."

Neary thought about what had happened these last few days, and about what the future held for them. He thought about the man he had killed, that night he came home unexpectedly. But most of all he thought about the questions he would never ask his wife.

THE LANDLORD MURDER CASE

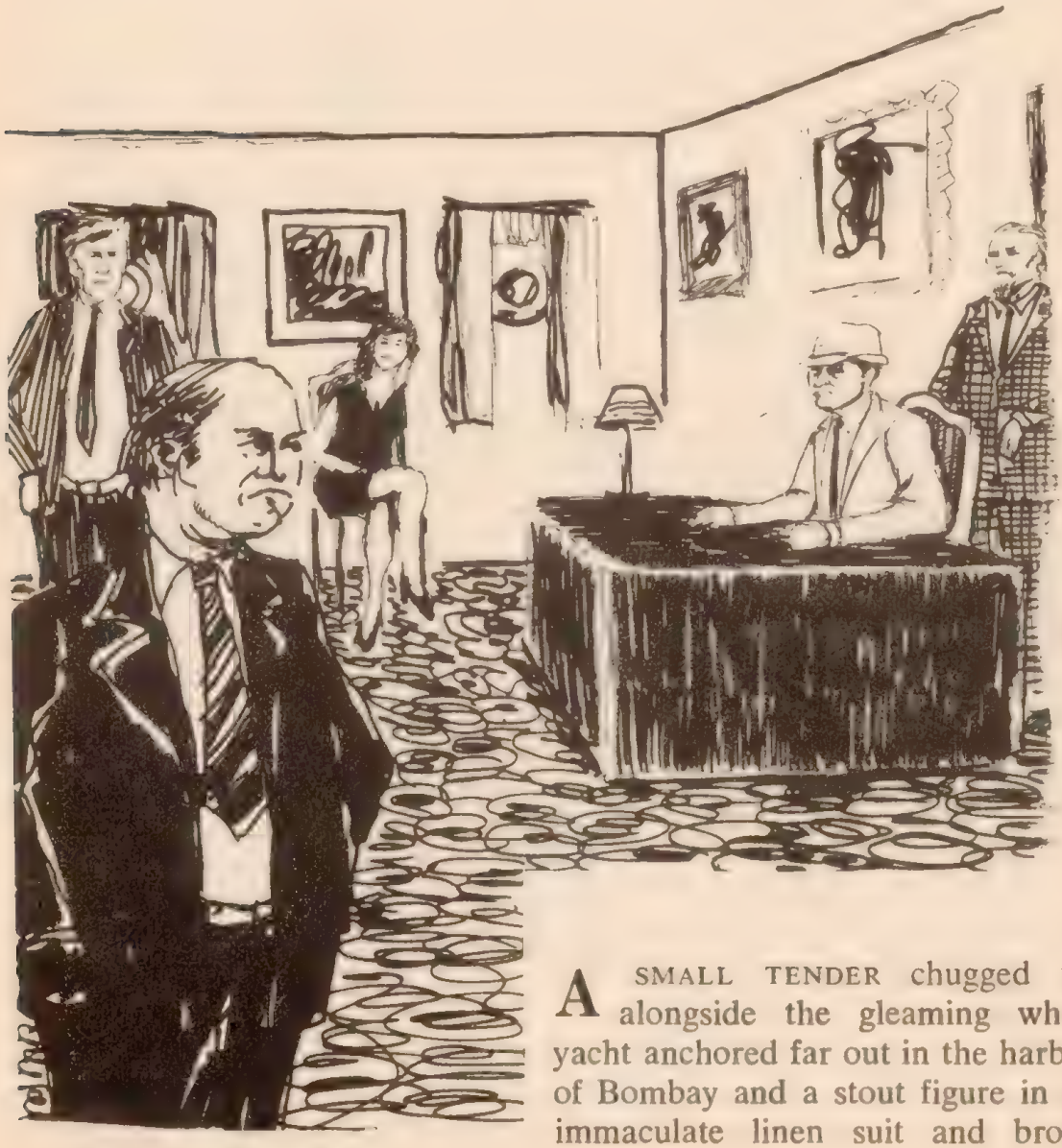
by Brett Halliday

The New Mike Shayne Story for Next Month

a MR. MEI WONG story by DAN ROSS

THE MISSING TAPESTRY

A priceless tapestry had been stolen, and one of three had to be the guilty party. Recovery and conviction seemed hopeless. "Hopeless?" Mei Wong smiled. "One little word will solve our case . . ."



A SMALL TENDER chugged up alongside the gleaming white yacht anchored far out in the harbor of Bombay and a stout figure in an immaculate linen suit and broad

panama hat carefully made his way from the swaying small craft to the platform and stairway that led up to the yacht.

The tender had already begun its journey back to the Bombay wharves as a slightly out-of-breath Mei Wong appeared on the deck of the yacht. A smile of recognition crossed the round, placid face of the elderly art dealer as he was met by a tall, broad-shouldered man with a white goatee.

"Thank you for coming so soon, Mr. Wong." Martin Manuelis, the millionaire owner of the yacht, grapsed Mei Wong's hand with a bear-like grip. "I didn't know who else to turn to. I'm in the devil of a fix!"

The art dealer nodded. "Your phone message certainly had the air of urgency. You were close to being incoherent."

Manuelis made a gesture of despair. "No wonder. The tapestry is missing. The priceless eighteenth century dragon boat festival tapestry I purchased from you. And it must have been stolen by one of my guests."

Mei Wong could understand the millionaire's concern. The tapestry had been one of the most valuable items his studio had ever handled.

"I assume you suspect someone?" he said.

Manuelis groaned. "It is most embarassing. But I have no alternative."

"Who do you think is the guilty party?"

"Any of the people here could have taken it."

"Where did you keep the tapestry?" Mei Wong asked.

"Temporarily I stored it in the closet of my own cabin. I intended to put it in a safe place ashore in a few days. I shouldn't have waited. I was called away from the ship yesterday. The thief must have secured a duplicate of the key to the closet and taken it. I hadn't discussed the tapestry or anything concerning it with any of them. So I don't understand how anyone knew."

"Yet one of them must certainly have learned it was here," Mei Wong commented. "Realizing the value of the item, the party succumbed to temptation and stole it."

"That seems pretty clear," Manuelis agreed with a sigh.

"We must find this white-washed crow," Mei Wong said. "With a little shrewd observation we should soon note signs of his darkness showing."

Manuelis led the rotund art dealer to his lavish cabin and stood by while he made a thorough inspection of the closet. Then the art dealer turned to him.

"Now I'd like to meet your guests," he said.

Shortly afterward they came to the cabin. There were three of them. Charles Belden, fat and redhaired, an American stock broker; Dolly Lane, the lovely Broadway star, bru-

nette and tall; and sour-faced Clarence Dent, an elderly millionaire art collector.

Mei Wong, who sat behind the millionaire's desk, greeted the three with an easy smile. "It is kind of you to come here at my request. I shall certainly not delay you longer than necessary."

Dolly Lane sat in an easy chair opposite him and helped herself to a cigarette. "Whats all the mystery? Manuelis wouldn't tell us a thing."

Charles Belden stepped forward, red-faced and blustering. "I want to know what this means. Summoning us here like school children."

From the back of the cabin old Clarence Dent said dryly, "If you'll give Mei Wong a chance to speak I'm sure he'll be glad to explain."

Mei Wong bowed. "So kind of you, Mr. Dent. And quite correct."

Manuelis, who stood by Mei Wong, cleared his throat and addressed his guests with an unhappy expression.

"I must tell you that I greatly dislike the situation with which we are faced. But there is a thief on the yacht!"

Charles Belden sputtered. "Are you suggesting—"

"I am suggesting nothing," Manuelis went on. "But I have had a valuable tapestry stolen from my cabin. One I recently purchased from Mei Wong."

The art dealer looked at the three with keen eyes. "We hope that one of you might be able to help us."

Dolly Lane chuckled. "Well, it's true I have had two unsuccessful plays in the past year. And actually I'm rather hard up. But if I decided to turn thief I'd go after something a little easier to cash in on than a tapestry."

Manuelis blushed and moved across to the actress. "I assure you, Miss Lane, there is nothing personal in this."

"Don't try to be delicate, Martin." She looked at him with teasing eyes. "This is not a delicate matter. You think one of us is a crook."

"I should have known better than to accept your invitation on this cruise," Belden, the stock broker, said bitterly ."And with your permission I'll leave the ship at once."

Dent, the sour collector, gave a thin cackle of laughter. "He may not give permission unless his tapestry turns up."

Belden turned on the old man. "You keep out of this! And anyway, you're the only one who'd be interested in an item like that."

Mei Wong stood up and interrupted what appeared to be a growing argument between the two men.

"I am sorry we have upset you," he said. "But one has to start an investigation somewhere. The tapestry will find a ready market in the underworld of unscrupulous dealers. There are many who would be willing to pay a price for a rich and rare design of this type."

Belden, the stock broker, touched a match to a huge cigar he'd stuck in his mouth. "Doesn't concern me. Those eighteenth century tapestries may be worth plenty. But I'm still more interested in good, solid bonds!"

Dent frowned. "I don't agree. I'd rather have that tapestry than any amount of bonds. Although I didn't steal it. Put that tapestry or any other piece of its type beside a stack of bonds to equal its value. You'd find it much better to look at than the little stack of paper."

Belden gave a nasty grin. "But it's the little stack of paper that pays the bills."

"And puts the money into shows," Dolly Lane joined in. "I'm on Mr. Belden's side. I like the bonds."

Manuelis looked at Mei Wong with dismay. "This is all so pointless. We are getting nowhere."

"On the contrary," Mei Wong shook his head. "I think we have arrived at the answer to our problem." He moved toward the three and eyed them each in turn. Then he added slowly, "I know now who the thief is."

Dolly Lane sat back with a gasp. "You do? I hope you don't think I'm the one."

The art dealer smiled blandly and turned to Manuelis. "You said when I first came here, Mr. Manuelis, that no one aboard knew about the tapestry. That you had not mentioned it or described it to anyone."

"That is so," Manuelis nodded.

"And yet, just now, one of these good people did accurately give a partial description of the tapestry." Mei Wong faced Belden. "You remember, Mr. Belden?"

The stock broker registered astonishment and removed the cigar from his mouth. "What's this?"

"Only a few moments ago," Mei Wong went on calmly, "you accurately told us that the tapestry was an eighteenth century piece. A thing you could only know by seeing it and realizing its value. I don't think you are as ignorant of oriental art as you would have us believe, Mr. Belden. And I suggest that your host search your quarters on board very carefully."

With a strangled cry of anger Belden made a break for the cabin door, only to be met by one of the ship's officers armed with a revolver. The big man stopped short and turned to the group in the cabin, with his guilt clearly showing in his coarse face.

"A small precaution I suggested," Mei Wong smiled. "To catch a slippery frog requires more than one hand."

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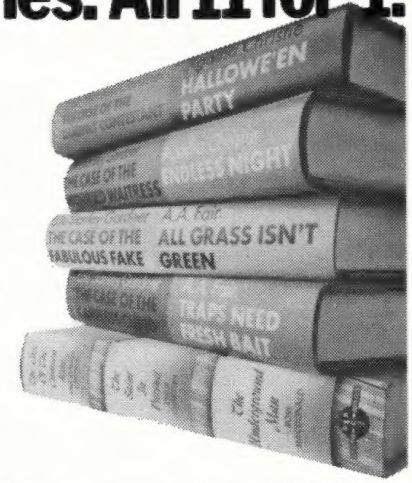

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